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MIRIAM COPLEY.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“NOVELS AND NOVELISTS,” “CREWE RISE,”

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MIRIAM COPLEY.

CHAPTER I.

A CHANGE IN MY PROSPECTS.

I PASSED several hours in a state of torpor, that was broken only for a few seconds at a time by a series of novel experiences. Cordials were administered to me ; a doctor with the gentlest possible voice was summoned to prescribe for me ; tender hands supported me when I was required to move ; silver whispers floated through my ears ; I was conscious of

being lowered by degrees into a delicious, voluptuous volume of warm water, in which I laved and paddled with a drowsy sense of luxury, and from which I was taken out and rubbed with brushes and towels, so that my veins and nerves tingled with excitement and a hot glow came on all my skin; I was aware also of being lifted into a magnificent bed, covered with a grand canopy, where I slept and woke, took cups of hot broth, and then once more slept and woke—again and again. When I first fairly opened my eyes and roused myself to collect my thoughts, a feeling of wonder held me as to who the persons were who had treated me with such exquisite humanity, and where they had hidden themselves. Where was the doctor? where the ladies? where the grave and sober nurse? had I only dreamt of such charitable beings? and would the bright light streaming through the window opposite my bed restore me to my old dread of all that bore the form of men?

These questions were answered by a lady stepping from behind the bed-curtain, and asking me how I felt. When I informed her that I was quite well again, she proceeded to tell me that I had passed nearly three days in a state of semi-consciousness, and that she had watched me for many hours of that time. She told me I should soon be strong again, and as long as her weak powers would enable her she would protect me. And, as she gave me this cheering assurance, she stooped down and kissed me lightly on my eyelids, and, smiling a little naïvely, she added in a rich but soft voice :—

“You’re a pretty girl, Miriam.”

“How do you know my name?”

“I was told it. Do you know mine?”

“No, I don’t know your name, and I don’t know you,” I answered.

In saying this I spoke truly, for though it was Miss Ufford who addressed me, she was so altogether different from what she appeared to

me when I first saw her in the "George" parlour, that for a few moments I could not recognise her. Possibly the difference was caused by her change of costume; for now she no longer wore her beaver bonnet, and dark veil, and cloth cloak, but was habited in a closely-fitting stuff dress. She did not look so brilliant, so dazzlingly beautiful; she was not so tall, she was not so imposing as the young lady of the parlour—she was graver, more staid, and with less animation. Her light hair was dressed so as to lie close to her head, and I remarked she had no ornaments on her person—not even a ring on her fingers. But in whatever respects she seemed altered, she also appeared to me improved. Her quietness and composure of manner impressed me as being only a veil beneath which was partly hid a nature not only lovable, but as powerful as it was truly feminine.

"Come, can't you recall my face now?" she inquired with a smile, after she had given

me a couple of minutes for reassembling my scattered faculties.

“You’re the lady I saw the first night, with the other lady.”

“That’s right.”

“You are Miss Ufford.”

“Right again.”

“And you—”

“Well?”

“Are *his* cousin.”

“Yes,” replied Miss Ufford, with a return of her droll smile, “I am, as you say, his cousin.”

“Oh! I have been dreaming about him.”

Another smile from the lady.

“Have you seen him, ma’am?”

“Yes, and he has been here to look at you.”

“Has he told you anything about me?”

“He has left a message for you.”

“What is it, ma’am?” I cried, springing up in my bed.

“He wishes you to know that Mrs. Muscut

is in her usual health; she is not dead; she recovered from the overdose of medicine that was given her; the drug only sent her to a sound sleep. All is well. Now compose yourself, I must leave you for a short time."

"Oh, do not go, Miss Ufford. I am very frightened."

"I will stop—only you may not talk."

On this assurance I let my head fall back on my pillow, and, closing my eyes, seemed to sleep. I honestly tried to slumber, but I could not succeed in the attempt. So I raised my eyelids to feast myself once more with a sight of Miss Ufford, and I beheld, to my surprise, and awe, and sacred delight, that lovely girl on her knees, making in silence a short prayer to God. My looking at her did not disturb her, although she was aware I observed her. Without rising, she took my hand in hers and continued her quiet entreaties. Never had I dreamed of such happiness, such solemn joy as then pervaded me. I lay mutely resolving

to do my utmost to be a good woman, and the tears silently fell down my cheeks. Then Miss Ufford rose from her knees and glided from the room, and I was not any longer afraid to be left alone.

I remained another night in the same bed, and almost the whole of the following day, being visited several times by my kind friends, Mrs. Cookesley and Miss Ufford; but when the dusk of evening began to creep on, a servant-girl entered the room, and, encouraging me to get up, offered to assist me in my toilet. This person turned out to be Miss Ufford's maid; and she brought with her a complete suit of sumptuous apparel—linen, stout shoes, stuff frock, a bonnet, and a warm cloak—such as I had never worn. This raiment was for me; and the maid who brought the clothes, a good-natured, clever girl, helped me to put them on, and with a good heart did her best to brush a gloss in my thick, dark hair, and put the polish of civilization on my

person. When this was accomplished, Mrs. Cookesley bustled into the room, and taking me bodily up in her arms, although I was nearly as tall as she was, carried me down a flight of stairs, hurried along a succession of passages, then went down more stairs, and eventually deposited me in a carriage that was standing drawn close up by the side of the door, leading into the High Street. In another instant, the maid had taken her seat by my side, and we were conveyed about a couple of hundred yards, across the irregular market-square of Aldeburgh, when the vehicle stopped at a little detached cottage, that contained about six small rooms, and commanded a view of the sea, the market-square, and the grand old ruins of Dunwich Castle, standing upon a hill, about a mile from the town, and half a mile off the post-road.

As an invalid, I was immediately consigned to a bed in a little room in this small cottage. But before I composed myself for the night

Miss Ufford visited me, and informed me that I was her guest, and should remain so as long as I was a good girl.

Again I slept soundly. It was scarcely daybreak when I awoke, but I could not rest any longer in bed. I rose from the white dimity-curtained couch on which I had rested, and inspected my apartment and all its contents. I found a little toilet-table in an appropriate corner, and all the articles of apparel I had worn on the previous day neatly folded up, and laid upon two chairs. I drew up the blind, and saw the grand ocean tossing about merrily before me. Then I dressed. How I enjoyed the dignity and luxury of washing like a lady! My last operation before putting on my stuff frock was to brush my hair as furiously and long as Miss Ufford's maid had brushed it the night before. When this was done, and I had clad myself with my outer robe, I gazed at my semblance in the looking-glass with unmitigated astonishment.

Had I seen myself for the first time in a room full of people, I should never have recognised myself. Why, I was nearly a woman in height. I was very thin, but my dress of dark green stuff was well made, and showed off my figure to the best advantage; my hands were no longer grimed with dirt, and were as clean as they were well shaped,—they would soon become as white as Miss Ufford's; my neck certainly was as long and straight as a bit of tape, and ran up, from the white muslin tuck which concealed my angular collar-bones and shoulder-tops, like a stick of macaroni, but at the top of it was a head, the external lineaments of which now put its organs of thought into a state of activity. I saw a profusion of black hair rising from a well-shaped, ample—but not conspicuously large—forehead, and falling back over my shoulder-blades; I saw a small, oval face, pale, and painfully pointed about the chin and nose, but possessing the points requisite for a very commanding and

singular style of loveliness ; I saw, moreover, a pair of saucy, pouting lips, and a pair of dark eyes, that seemed positively enormous as they shone forth over the starved cheeks, and I marked with satisfaction that they were veiled with longer lashes than I had ever seen on any other person, and were surmounted by thick, prominent curves of fine black hair, that shadowed off delicately at their extremities.

My readers must bear in mind the nature of my life, which, of course, did not admit of my having, scarcely on any previous occasion, had the pleasure of a deliberate examination of my bodily characteristics.

Aha, Miriam Copley ! I see now what your ill-starred father meant by telling you that your dark eyes would help you to get a living.

It's no longer a mystery why Mr. Rawleigh Ufford took it into his head to sketch you, and why Mr. Millicent called you a witch in childhood, or some such thing.

Miss Ufford, too, praised your looks, Miriam Copley, and kissed your eyelids!

Surely 'tis a comfortable, pleasant, cheering, exhilarating thing, to discover one's self to be beautiful! It may be foolish for men to prize highly the charms of feminine loveliness and grace. It may be true that, while the beautiful is to be highly esteemed in all the other objects of nature, it is to be mistrusted and condemned in woman. But the powers of error will triumph in this particular; and as long as the world is a world, no woman will really influence it, through her own self, and apart from external aids, whom the malignant fairy has cursed with ugliness!

Such thoughts as these were passing through my head, when the door of my room was opened and Miss Ufford entered on tiptoe.

"What! already up and dressed?" she said, stretching out to me a hand which I took, and kneeling kissed.

“Up, child—up from your knees,—I am not a queen.”

“But you are an angel.”

“Tut,—perhaps you’ll change your mind soon. Perhaps I shall buy a cane and discipline you after the fashion of Mrs. Muscut.”

“Have you heard more of her, ma’am?”

“No questions about that terrible old woman, now. Come and eat your breakfast. You ought to have an appetite by this time.”

She led the way downstairs, and I followed her into a pretty little parlour, scantily furnished, but containing a piano, a mirror, a few pictures, and some other trifling articles of luxury, that greatly impressed my unsophisticated intelligence. On the table the materials for breakfasting were spread on a white cloth, and in an easy-chair, by the fire, sate the grand old fragment of an English gentleman, whose altercation with Mr. Tomlinson in the billiard-room I had witnessed.

“Papa,” said Miss Ufford, sedately, “this is my young friend, Miriam Copley. Allow me to introduce her to you. I trust you will find her an agreeable addition to our household.”

On this, the Honourable Algernon Ufford rose and bowed politely a welcome to me, and, having mumbled out an expression of his pleasure at making my acquaintance, sank back into his easy-chair again, and directed all his energies to the consumption of a liberal portion of oatmeal porridge, which Miss Ufford put before him. That lady then made tea for herself and me, and encouraged me to make a hearty breakfast. We were a silent trio. Miss Ufford read a letter. Her papa, having devoured his porridge, treated an enormous quantity of ham and bread and butter in the same way, and when he had quite satisfied his appetite, he sate without speaking, looking intently at his long, well-shaped hands, which he held up, folded and

still, before him, his elbows meanwhile resting on the arms of his chair. His white locks and white whiskers and huge aquiline nose had a grand effect; but I found myself thinking that, were it not for his high shirt-collars, and abundance of snowy linen, which gave him a certain respectability of appearance, he would have seemed a disorderly, wicked old man.

Not one word did this strange old gentleman say during the whole of breakfast; he never added even a grunt of approval or dissent to the little conversation that passed between Miss Ufford and myself; but when the urn and breakfast-things were carried off by the maid, he suddenly brightened up, and fixing his dim eyes on me, said, "Do you play cards?"

"No—no, sir," I answered, with some surprise.

"Umph!—don't know how to play cards at your age! Why, bless my soul, where have

you been brought up? You're not a Wesleyan? or a Methodist?—eh? or a Pogram?—eh?” he inquired, not irritably, but with an air of blank astonishment.

“Oh, no, papa, she's not a Wesleyan,” put in Miss Ufford, with a full rich intonation. “You are all for Church and State, are you not?—true blue?”

I quickly took the cue thus given me, and wondering what on earth the words meant, said, “Oh, yes, sir; I am all for Church and State!”

“Do you hate the French?”

“Very much, sir.”

“Do you hate the Pope and the Papists?”

“I abominate them, sir.”

My host was evidently well pleased with my answers, for turning to his daughter, he observed, “I like your young friend, my dear; wondrous nice girl!—Only you must teach her to play cards.—Miss Miriam, can you play pitch-halfpenny?”

This inquiry staggered me more than any of the previous ones. I did know how to play pitch-halfpenny, but I had a lively fear that I ought to be ashamed of having such an accomplishment at command.

Again Miss Ufford came to my relief, saying, in the gravest manner, "Surely, Miriam, you can play pitch-halfpenny. It's such a capital game—and so very simple."

"Yes, sir, I can play pitch-halfpenny ;—and I should like to play with you."

"Then, my dear," returned the old man cordially, "we'll have a game this afternoon. Only, now, I must go off into the town to meet a few friends."—And so saying he rose, and left the room, bowing to me as if I had been a princess.

"Papa is gone to the billiard-room where you saw him the other night," observed Miss Ufford as soon as her father had quitted the house. "And now let me give you my first lesson in the arts of life."

Instead of proceeding, as I expected she would, to talk to me on more important matters, Miss Ufford took from a drawer in a little side-table a pack of cards, and gave me a brief and lucid explanation of their leading features and purposes. This was one of the occasions in my life when my quick wits gave me infinite satisfaction. It would have pained me acutely to have proved myself a dull pupil to so charming an instructress. As it was, I astonished her with my quickness of perception, retentiveness of memory, and clearness of understanding. The suits, and the mutual relations of the cards composing them, immediately adapted themselves to my mind, and ere twenty minutes were over I was playing "Beg my neighbour" with my young mistress, as if I had been familiar with the game for years. When I had perfectly mastered this simple game, Miss Ufford produced a cribbage-board, and introduced me to its mysteries. Then we set-to, and had a good two hours' work at five-card

cribbage, and with such facility did I make myself possessed of all the chances of the game that, although the cards were pretty evenly divided, I won the last three rubbers from my opponent.

“That is very satisfactory!” said Miss Ufford, putting up the cards. “Now you can be of real use to me, for you can play such games as this one with papa, when I am not well enough to amuse him.”

“Is he very fond of games, ma’am?”

“Very. He cares for nothing else so much.”

“They seem simple things,” said I, “for a gentleman to care so much about.”

“Very simple,—but papa is a simple man, and it will give you pleasure to please him.”

“Certainly—I’ll do my best to make him happy.”

“And to make all the world besides happy too, child, I trust.”

“Of course, ma’am.”

“And why ‘of course?’—what is your reason?”

“Because it answers. If a person makes others happy, then others will try and make that person happy. And so one is able to get on in the world. That’s what I mean by saying it answers.”

At first Miss Ufford smiled, but the expression of amusement quickly passed away, and a grave sorrow came over her face as if I had said something that pained her acutely; but that sad aspect disappeared like the other, and she remarked with more than her usual softness, “You’re right, dear,—it does answer. And make people happy from that reason—till you have a better.”

“Tell me a better one.”

“Don’t be in a hurry. I trust you’ll find the better reason out for yourself soon;—and it will be better for you to discover it yourself than have me push it into you.”

“Thank you. I had rather find it out for myself.”

“You’re a clever child.”

“I am, ma’am.”

“How do you know that?”

“By seeing how stupid other people are. Ever since I was a little girl I could see the blunders of other people, how they took a great deal of trouble to do things they might have done without any trouble at all, and how they did not see the meanings of things, and how they would talk—and talk—and talk about simple matters known to everybody, as if they were known only to a few.”

“Miriam, it makes me tremble to hear you—I am almost afraid of you.”

“Oh, dear madam, do not be afraid of me. Who?—what has made you fear me? Have you heard—? Did he tell you—? That is, Mrs. Muscut?”

“I know all about that terrible woman, and what you meant to do to her; but I am not afraid of you for that reason. Tell me now, do you forgive her?”

"I don't know—I can't say."

"Do you harbour any resentment to her?"

"I would not do her a wrong now, Miss Ufford," said I slowly, after much consideration.

"Ay, but would you like to hear she had come to some great misfortune?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Ufford—that I should—very much."

"Then you don't forgive. Try, dear, your best—your very best to forgive her."

"Why should I try to forgive her, miss?"

"Because it will *answer*. You'll be well *paid*, if you try. Your ill-feeling wont hurt *her*, but it assuredly will hurt yourself. As long as you harbour one spark of malevolence to that cruel woman, a smouldering fire will be slowly eating away at all the goodness within you."

"But if I may not hate her, what *may* I do, Miss Ufford? I must do something."

"Pity her. Till you've brought yourself to

do so, you'll never be really happy—and the same as you were before she treated you so barbarously.”

Without knowing it, my gentle mistress had laid her hand straight down on the most tender of all my sore points. I could not forbear from a short cry of agony, as I exclaimed in answer:—“Oh, Miss Ufford, don't ever say such a thing as that to me again, or put me in mind of what I might have been. I shall never lose the evil that woman has put into me. It is here—here—” I said, beating my breast. “I will try to keep it there, to let no one see it or imagine it, to let it do no one any harm, to keep it chained up, to allow it to devour no one except myself; but it will be there, as long as I live, escaping to do as much harm as possible, at every opportunity, and then returning worse than it was before.”

In all my acquaintance with my mistress, whenever I was impetuous, headstrong, or violent, she did not oppose me with censure,

but calmed me with an increase of gentleness. It was so on this occasion. She came across the little parlour to me, put her hand on me, stroked my hair, once or twice kissed me ; and when she had soothed me into something like my ordinary composure, she persuaded me to go upstairs, and put on my bonnet and cloak, and accompany her for a walk through the town, and on the beach.

Soon we were walking through the town together. We inspected all the principal points of interest, the almshouses, the town hall, and the public pump ; we even went a mile beyond the outskirts, and made a nearer survey than I had yet been enabled to make of the ruins of Dunwich Castle ; and then we turned round towards the sea-shore, by the side of which we strolled for half an hour. There were not many people to be seen in the streets, or on the beach promenade, but the few who were visible, one and all, gave a cordial and respectful greeting to my companion.

They did not stop and enter into conversation with us. (I afterwards discovered that they never did so, out of respect to Miss Ufford's wishes.) But each passer-by, man or woman, gentle or simple, accorded my mistress some form or other of hearty recognition. I became, in a certain way, proud of one who received such unmistakeable demonstrations of goodwill, and I felt that, as long as I lived under her protection, I need fear no molestation from any earthly power.

"Who built Dunwich Castle?" I inquired of Miss Ufford.

"We did, nearly a thousand years ago," was the answer, made with the same simplicity with which she would have stated an ordinary fact.

"Indeed!—but who let it fall into a ruin?"

"We did—three or four hundred years since. It belongs to *us*."

"What? to Mr. Ufford—your papa?"

"No, no, child—to the Earl."

“ Are the Earl and he relations ? ”

“ Brothers. The Earl of Linton-Stetchworth, who lives at Linton, and is so hard on poachers, as you told my cousin Rawleigh, is my uncle.”

“ Indeed !—then, shall I see the Earl ? ”

“ Perhaps you will one day.”

“ What !—at your house ? ”

“ I am afraid not. He never enters it, and I dare say, if he was reminded of my existence, he would pretend that he had forgotten me, and that he ever had a brother to be my father.”

“ Why don't they know each other ? ”

“ They have quarrelled ; so you must be careful never to mention to papa a syllable about ‘ the Earl,’ for it annoys him and makes him very angry.”

“ Do you hate the Earl ? ”

“ No, my dear.”

“ Do you like him ? ”

“ I trust I don't dislike him.”

“Is he a good man?”

“He is a *just* one.”

This appeared to me very strange, and set me musing on the singular change that had befallen me. There was I, suddenly elevated from a position of ignominy to be the companion, almost the friend, of the niece of that great Earl whom I had looked up to from infancy as one of the astounding facts of creation,—a being second only to the King of England.—What would next happen to me?

The reverie into which this question led me was broken by Miss Ufford proceeding in a communicative manner, the condescension and matter-of-course quiet of which astonished me when I afterwards reflected on it, to inform me what her intentions were with regard to me, and to confide to me many particulars concerning her own position. Her motives for resolving to take care of me were twofold: her cousin Rawleigh had begged her to take me under her protection, and she herself had

long wanted some object in life, on which she might expend benevolence, and from which she might receive in return the fealty of strong personal attachment. She told me she was poor, indeed, for a lady, very poor, and often had to do as she best could without the ordinary comforts, indeed necessities of life, and therefore she explained to me, that in most respects I must consider myself as her domestic attendant. But she did not mean me to be altogether a servant; she wanted me also for a friend, and a principal part of her plan was to educate me in some of the common departments of learning, so that in after-life I should have at my command the means of filling a superior place as a servant, or a wife, according as it should please God to fashion my destiny. For herself, she could not promise to do more for me than this. Most probably, ere many years were over, she would have no home for her own head, and would have to seek a shelter amongst strangers.—And as she said this, a deep and

unusual sadness came over her fair face ; and the delicate features, which mirth showed off to such advantage, assumed an expression of touching dejection. But this aspect quickly passed away, and I very rarely saw it again. Not unfrequently, when she conversed with me or her father, or the one or two other companions of her secluded life, her countenance, and words, and voice, and manner, were arch and softly playful, but usually the leading characteristic of her gentle, considerate, gracious bearing was womanly goodness.

CHAPTER II.

MY EDUCATION IN CERTAIN POLITE ARTS.

I WAS soon established familiarly in Laburnum Cottage, as Miss Ufford's residence was named, not because its garden contained a laburnum tree, or because it hadn't one, but because it had had one. Had I not been informed by my mistress of the fact, I should never, from any of the circumstances of my life, have discovered that I was her maid; it seemed to me that I was her guest, and nothing more—I mean nothing less. The old

servant left, and I nominally took her place ; but her work was almost entirely performed by an old woman who entered the cottage at the dawn, and left it at the dusk of each day. All the servile tasks that I was expected to perform were, waiting on my mistress, dusting the furniture of the house, and arranging the table on which our simple meals were served. But, in all other respects, I was treated both by Miss Ufford and her father as an equal. I was dressed in what appeared to me royal raiment, and in reality was fit apparel for a gentleman's daughter.

It would weary my readers if I told them the childish pleasure I took in this alteration of dress. If I recollect rightly, it was not in my spotless and well-fitting stuff frocks, or my shoes, or gloves, or bonnets, that I derived the greatest pleasure, but in the abundance of snowy linen, white collars, tiny cuffs, and crimp tucks, which my mistress presented me with, and encouraged me to wear.

Scarcely a day passed on which I had not to play, for two, three, or even four hours, games of some sort or other with Mr. Ufford. The old gentleman, much to my satisfaction, conceived a strong liking for me, and under his tutelage I became an adept in handling cards and dice. I was very glad of this, for, in amusing him, I performed good service to my mistress, who on more than one occasion thanked me for the enthusiasm and skill I displayed in keeping her dear father happy, and contented to spend his evenings at home, instead of at "The George;"—the night air was so bad for him! It can easily be believed that when the novelty of the games had worn off, it often irked me sorely to play them; but I was careful to disguise my *ennui*; and, to do my venerable playmate justice, I must say that he did his utmost to make the hours pleasant to me that I spent with him. Indeed, he was more than merely pleasant,—he was instructive. He displayed to me all he

knew—and it wasn't a little—of the doctrines of chances, and taught me to calculate on certain combinations of powers with singular nicety. He showed me how to shuffle any card I liked to the bottom of the pack, and how to make my opponent at whist cut the ace of trumps into my hand. And many other little secrets of the same kind he made me mistress of. Tipt cards and loaded dice soon became familiar to me. My interesting tutor also gave me brilliant descriptions of Crockford's and Watier's, and the various fashions of playing which rogues and gentlemen indulged in in those magnificent clubs; he explained to me also the mysteries of Newmarket, and the subtle methods by which "knowing ones" made up their books, concealed the years of "aged horses," bribed jockeys, and fleeced dupes. In the same way all the knotty points that perplexed a young student of the laws of "the ring," and of "the duel," were unfolded for my edification; and

I learnt how honourable gentlemen would cease to be honourable, if they were deprived of the noble privilege of shooting each other, and how true British pluck would rise or fall, just as the British aristocracy supported or discountenanced the noble art of self-defence.

I should be ungrateful to my teacher, in these important branches of art, if I did not add that he enriched his lessons with a wealth of biographic anecdote that was calculated to raise human nature greatly in the estimation of any person who heard the stories for the first time. Not a trick could be won at any game of cards that did not suggest to Mr. Ufford the remembrance of some adroit piece of rascality performed by Lord This or the Honourable That. Every throw of the dice brought up a story of some distinguished sharper.

At first, Miss Ufford watched me intently and jealously, as I sat playing with her papa. It was clear to me that she was afraid that, unsophisticated as I was, I should be clever

enough to read his history and character, or that I should manifest such eagerness and passion in the incidents of the games as would prove that my own character might suffer from such amusements. I detected her anxiety, and that if I let her imagine I was familiar with her parent's frailty and shame, I should pain, and possibly offend her. It was equally clear to me also that, if she detected any signs of the cards and dice having an injurious influence over me, she would never rest till she had separated me from them, and consequently from herself. I was compelled to be a hypocrite. Oh, Caroline, believe me when I assure you that I never felt such pain as I experienced when I first deceived you in this particular!

I never allowed my eye by one incautious gleam, or my tongue by one hasty word, or my hand by one impetuous movement, to betray the excitement I underwent over the cards or the back-gammon. And I

simulated a childish confidence in, and admiration for, the old man whom it was the dearest object of my mistress's pious heart, to adorn with all the choicest flowers and offerings of filial reverence. Though in this I outwitted and tricked my dear mistress, I was not angry with her deception. Instead of resenting her want of confidence in me, I loved her yet the more passionately for the noble falsehood which would alone have sanctified the existence of an ordinary woman. And I would fain persuade myself that in the sentiments which induced me to pretend ignorance of one principal interest of her life there lurked some little of that same pious regard for the beautiful and the sacred of humanity, which nerved her to deceive her father, and possibly herself—and to try to deceive me.

Notwithstanding the claims made on my attention by Mr. Ufford, I had plenty of time left on my hands for other employments; and this leisure I zealously devoted to carrying

out my mistress's directions for my education. Spelling and reading were arts I soon achieved a respectable proficiency in; and the theory of writing I easily acquired; but its practice was not attained to with a like facility, for my fingers were stiff and awkward enough in this attempt at caligraphy. Perseverance and resolute determination, however, ere long, overcame this difficulty. My mistress instructed me in the rudiments of arithmetic, and I not only astonished her with becoming thoroughly versed in the primary rules, within the space of a week or two, but I also, ere a month had elapsed, was able to pose her with questions in fractions and decimals. With the same rapidity and absence of effort, I went through the usual school primers, geography, and Roman and English history.

“Miriam,” observed Miss Ufford to me, shortly after I had been with her ten weeks, “you are a singular girl. God intended you for something better than a maid-servant.”

“I think so too,” I responded quickly, bringing the side clusters of my black hair forwards, and flashing my eyes at my mistress. I spoke very softly. It had been a study with me to imitate Miss Ufford’s silvery tones, and the mild composure of her manner.

“And you are not mistaken—you rarely are,” was the kind answer, “but say why you agree with me?”

“I feel it in me, that I shall rise in life—and one day be a lady. I am clever—my brain tells me so, and so do you; I am beautiful—that glass tells me so, and you cannot deny it. Why then may I not become a lady?”

“Possibly you are one already—although you are only fifteen years old.”

It was a bright, crisp, frosty morning of January; I had been out for a walk of two miles, and the flush of health was in my soft, delicate cheeks,—wan and pale no longer,—and the large pupils of my dark eyes gave an

additional meaning to the roses and lilies of my complexion, and the vermilion brightness of my small lips.

“Then you would like to get on in the world?” resumed my mistress.

“Very much.”

“Why?”

“Why,—why! what a question! Why, Miss Ufford,—wouldn’t you like to get on in the world?”

“Sometimes I think I should, my love,—but when I am in a wiser mood, I feel I would rather get out of it,” she returned simply.

“Well, ’tis a pity you should not have your toy,” she added, after a silence of some minutes,—“what would you have me do to help you to it.”

“Teach me all you know, just as if I was your sister—and not your servant.”

She laughed heartily at this—more boisterously than I had ever known her laugh

before. My request seemed to tickle in an unaccountable manner her sense of the humorous. But she became quiet, and considerably kind in her attention to me as I proceeded,—“I want you to teach me to read those foreign books which give you so much pleasure. I want to read, and write, and speak French, and German, and Italian ; I want to sing like you, and to play like you.”

“And I want you—strange, unearthly, fascinating child that you are—to go and write another copy. Come,—to work,—or I shall frown and look terrible things.”

But before I could obey, my attention, as well as that of my mistress, was arrested by a commotion and a scene of a most exciting character on the other side of the market-place, on which the windows of Laburnum Cottage looked from a secluded corner. Opposite to us stood an hotel called “The Dun Elephant ;” it was the opposition house to “The George,” and, as it was situated on the direct posting road, which

“The George” was not, it had a liberal share of public patronage. Up to the door, then, of this hotel, galloped on magnificent bay horses two grooms in resplendent liveries of crimson cloth and gold lace.

“Oh, Miss Ufford,” I exclaimed, “who are they? How magnificent! Are they soldiers? They can’t be servants.”

“Hush, darling,—don’t stand there—come a few paces away from the window. Look as much as you like,—it will amuse you,—but don’t let anyone see you. They are the Earl’s outriders.”

She was still speaking, when a travelling carriage of dusky red body, and wheels of the same colour picked out with vermilion, dashed into the square, and stopped suddenly in front of the posting-house. The carriage was an open britska, and was drawn by four iron-grey horses, which were ridden by postilions in the same gorgeous livery as that of the outriders. Behind the britska were two more mounted

attendants in crimson and gold, curvetting about on fiery bay horses. The only occupant of the vehicle, and the centre of all this splendour, was a thin, spare man—small of stature ; cold, crafty, and self-absorbed in expression ; of long, thin features and a ruddy complexion ; close-shaven, and with his white hair cropped short. He wore a white beaver hat with a broad brim—a jaunty satire on a quaker's ; and he had on an overcoat with an enormously high collar, of a snuff-coloured cloth ; but, in spite of the brisk sharpness of the morning air, he wore this coat open at the chest, and displayed an imposing amount of snowy shirt-frills ; bleached muslin cravat, and stiff collar. He did not uncover, but he bent forwards stiffly, once or twice, to the mob who gathered round the equipage, and cheered loudly. Beyond this faint recognition of the attentions bestowed on him, the great man gave no sign of consciousness that he was surrounded by gazers. He did not speak a word, but sat

looking straight forwards, and slightly inclined to the same direction, while the fresh horses were being put to his carriage. This was speedily accomplished. Four black horses belonging to the Earl, and sent on the previous day to the stables of "The Dun Elephant," speedily replaced the four grey steeds, and in a twinkling the glittering equipage dashed out of the market square, and through the little town, at the rate of twelve miles an hour.

When there was nothing unusual to be seen out of doors, I turned once more to my mistress. She was pale and agitated, and saddened by the bright pageant she had just witnessed, but she endeavoured to conceal her emotion from me.

"Then, is that the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth?" I asked.

"The same.—You see he is only a man, after all."

"Where is he going?"

"He is on his way to Linton, from

London. 'There will be grand doings at Linton now. Company will come pouring down from town; and the post-horses of 'The Elephant' will have enough to do. And we shall often have sights like these. We shall be quite gay."

"Do you ever go to Linton?"

"Not now. It is nearly five years since I was in Linton. I was there for all the gaiety and grandeur of the Christmas holidays, five years ago, and I enjoyed myself very much, —perhaps too much."

"Why have you not been there since?"

"I will tell you, Miriam,—but then, you must be careful not to ask me any more questions, for you may pain me more than you would like to reflect on. My uncle is angry with me. The Earl and my grand-mamma, my dear, kind, good grandmamma, are both angry with me for leaving them, and coming here to take care of papa. I know I am doing what is right; but it very

much discomforts me to know that I have displeased my nearest relations, with the exception of papa. They think that, now papa is *poor*, I ought not to be with him, but with *them*. You understand me? In some respects my task is a difficult one. But duty performed is sweet to look back upon, just in proportion as it was grievous in its accomplishment. Come, my beauty, open the piano, and I'll sing you a merry song."

The subject was dropped, and not resumed again for several days, but I fancied I discerned a change in my mistress's manner from the time of the Earl's passage through Aldeburgh. She became restless and apt to change colour. If she heard a sound of wheels or horses in the market square, she would look up fitfully, with an expression of sudden excitement in her countenance. She was never irritable to me; but I found myself thinking that she was sorely tempted to be fretful, and would have been so, had

it not been for her wonderful amiability of disposition. At times, too, a feverish, anxious look of expectation settled on her eyes; and on such occasions she would sigh.

As for me, the apparition of the great Earl perfectly unsettled me, and put a thousand fantastic notions into my head. The intelligence that had been imparted to me of the Christmas festivities at Linton took a strong hold on me, and actually inspired me with a feeling that I was treated unjustly in not being invited to them. In the grand company, would any of my friends be present? Would Mr. Watson be there? or Mr. Millicent? or Mr. Rawleigh Ufford? Was there any chance of the latter coming over to see his cousin Caroline at Aldeburgh?—to see me? Such were the questions which my foolish heart kept asking my wise head. And whenever I became a little calmer and more like my ordinary self, sure as fate, my composure was

routed by a carriage, or a party of horsemen scouring through the town on their way to the Linton revels.

In addition to whatever discomfort of mind Miss Ufford suffered under, from sources hidden from my observation, or only dimly guessed at by my sagacity, she now had more than ordinary anxiety in the conduct of her pitiable old father. The rumours that flew about of the balls, and dinners, and hunting excursions, at Linton, exacerbated all the evil qualities of the old man. I saw but little of him; but when he chanced to meet me, he was testy and passionate almost to madness. Ere noon he escaped every day from the cottage, and went to his favourite haunt, "The George" billiard-room, never returning home till late at night, hours after I was in bed, and supposed by my dear mistress to be asleep. She always received him at the door, and helped him dutifully up to his sleeping apartment, and often, after she had bidden

him “good night,” she would enter, on tiptoe, my little chamber, and watch in silence my quiet form and closed eyelids.

During these days of perturbation I did not relax my diligence in prosecuting my studies, and more closely than ever I conned that best of all my lessons—Caroline Ufford’s character. After getting over my first surprise at finding that every rule of her existence was different from any I had dreamt of, I deliberately set to work to discover what it was that rendered her distinct from all I had hitherto known of mankind. I made a hundred little essays at probing her character. By the many little artifices which feminine minds are alone subtle enough, or mean enough, to devise, I laid traps for her, endeavouring to arouse her curiosity, or to stimulate her readiness to confide in me the secrets of her life, or even to irritate her temper. I could not forbear from thus prying into and anatomising the very fibres of her heart.

One of the results of my investigations into my mistress's likes and dislikes was a discovery that she was always well-pleased when I startled her with an out-of-the-way suggestion. I often displayed an unmannerly curiosity—a curiosity absolutely audacious in a servant—on points connected with her own life. But she never reproved me for my forwardness, doubtless attributing the abruptness and impertinence of my remarks to ignorance of the world, and not to the less pardonable defect in which they most frequently originated.

Emboldened by these circumstances, I therefore, after striving for several days to keep my disquiet to myself, entered on a conversation with Miss Ufford, with a view to opening up the subject of the Linton festivities for further discussion.

“I had a dream last night.”

“Indeed, Miriam!”

“I fancied there was a great knocking at our front door, and that, as soon as I had

opened it, a great brown bear danced up the passage into this room, and seated himself on the table. I expected the animal would every instant catch hold of you and me and hug us to death. But, before I could find courage to scream for help, two savage-looking men rushed into the room and began fighting about the possession of the bear. They each laid claim to the creature, and admitted that each had made money at different times by showing it about at fairs. One of the claimants, who had a red cap on his head, said the bear ought to be his because he could make most money by exhibiting it. The other man, who was bald-headed, said he ought to have it, because he had made so little out of it. And they asked me to decide between them.

“And what was Miriam’s judgment?”

“That he should have the beast who knew how to make the most money by exhibiting it.”

“Admirably decided!”

“But the best of the dream remains yet to be told. Just as I had given my judgment, the red-capped man turned out to be Mr. Watson; the hatless man, Mr. Millicent; and the bear—the dancing bear—Mr. Rawleigh Ufford.”

The colour sprang into her face, and she was perhaps more startled than amused by the remarkable vision I had fabricated.

“It was a droll dream. I wish he had heard you tell it just now.”

“Why don’t you talk to me about him?”

“I will if you like.”

On this she proceeded to inform me, more particularly than she had previously done, of his great generosity of nature, his constant and unobtrusive consideration for the weak, and the superiority he displayed in every pursuit—of manly sport or study—which he undertook. It was he who sent to our cottage the monthly packet of music and books which constituted the principal source of pleasure in

my mistress's monotonous life. And he, it appeared, though he was a poor man for one in his high position, had undertaken to defray the expenses of any educational plan which Miss Ufford might think best for me to enter on.

As she proceeded on this topic, I watched my young mistress's face, and I saw it glow with a brightness that it did not ordinarily possess, and I noticed that, instead of speaking with her usual deliberation and precision, she faltered in her choice of words, and even stammered—in an eagerness to say truthfully and with force what she felt herself unable to clothe appropriately in language.

She was still talking about Rawleigh Ufford,—the gallant deeds he had accomplished when a schoolboy,—and I was still divided between admiration of the theme and the narrator, when there was a clatter of hoofs on the other side of the hill, and a party of Linton equestrians cantered over the

market-place. More than half of them were ladies. The entire cavalcade did not contain more than eighteen persons, but at first sight there seemed to be three times that number. The horses were high-bred, mettlesome, and well trained, and contrasted well both in shape and colour; there were large, high-boned, dark bay hunters, fiery chestnut colts, timid white palfreys, and cropped Irish horses. The ladies were attired in most picturesque costumes—some with plumes in their hats, some in riding-habits of different hues. One dark-eyed, proud, scornful girl, mounted on a perfectly black steed, was clad in a crimson robe, and close behind her followed on a gentle pony, with elastic limbs, a smiling blonde beauty in a habit of fine Venetian cloth, as white as snow. These two girls were in costumes more remarkable than their companions, who, as a rule, kept to green or black habits, with here and there a bright kerchief or sash fluttering over their bosoms.

I observed that they leaned backwards or forwards, or swayed from side to side fearlessly, and seemed as much at home on their horses as if they were walking on a drawing-room carpet, and their musical voices and laughter, directed to the gentlemen who rode carelessly amongst them, made me very envious of their happiness and splendour.

The party swept round the market-place, and, scudding under our windows, proceeded in the direction of the Dunwich ruins.

“They are gone to look at the castle, Miss Ufford.”

“They have a beautiful day for the excursion.”

“They’ll be back in half an hour, and we shall see them again. What a pity it is a sight does not last longer!”

“But see, Miriam,—it is not all over yet.”

She was right. Calmly, and at foot pace, there now came riding over the market-square

a lady and gentleman. The former struck me as the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. My mistress was plain when compared with her. She was tall and slight, with a minute figure, of a size and delicacy that would have become one only two-thirds of her height. Her dark-green riding habit fitted exactly to her small shape, and it was made without any superfluous ornament; and she had no feather in her hat, to irritate the spectator who desired to inspect deliberately her delicate face. My egotism immediately discerned that she had all those personal characteristics which I was destined to possess on coming to womanhood. It surprised me, that as she passed under our windows she checked her horse to a yet slower pace, and, looking up at me, kissed her hand. The recognition, I of course knew, was waved towards my mistress, on the chance of her being anywhere in a position to observe it.

“Who is she?”

“Miss Augusta Wingfield. She is the heiress of Braden Manor, and owner of a large fortune besides. She is said to be the richest and most beautiful heiress in England.”

“Who is the gentleman who rides by her side?”

“My cousin—Lord Cheveley. He will, on the death of my uncle, be Earl of Linton-Stetchworth.”

“Lord Cheveley!—I remember.”

“What?”

“I remember Mr. Millicent—only he did not intend me to hear him—said that she would try to marry Lord Cheveley, and so make herself a countess.”

“You *heard* him say so! Did you *indeed* hear him say so?” exclaimed my mistress, with a wildness of fervour she had never before exhibited to me. “Oh, God grant he may have seen truly! that it may turn out as he prophesies! But yet, why should I say

so? No, no; it is wrong. I am a foolish, wicked girl. Oh God, pardon my impatience!"

She would have said more, but there was a tap at our little door, and I slipped out of our room to open it.

On putting the door back, and asking the stranger what he wanted, who was there but Rawleigh Ufford! He was altered since I had seen him, for he had shaved off his moustaches; but there was no other change in his colossal loveliness and bewitching frankness of urbanity.

"Why, Miriam, my pretty girl," said he, as he might have addressed a loved familiar, "you're so altered, so improved, I should scarce have known you had you been an ordinary mortal; but the man who has once looked at your eye-lashes is not likely to mistake them for the property of anyone else. There, child, don't be frightened; I mean to be a kind of father to you, so I have a right

to a kiss at such a glorious Christmas-tide as this."

"I was not frightened, sir, but so glad."

He laughed heartily at this, and finding no one in the little parlour downstairs, he ran upstairs—still laughing—and found his cousin in her *petite* morning-room (it would be absurd to call it a drawing-room), from which we had watched the cavalcade. I followed, and heard him repeat my unmeditated speech.

"Come, Caroline, cannot you pay me as pretty a compliment?"

"You haven't kissed *me* yet, Rawleigh," was the reproachful answer.

On this, the cousins embraced; and, that greeting over, my mistress sat down—looking pleased, and in her turn, to my mind, much more beautiful than Miss Augusta Wingfield—and observed, with the richest of her simple and hearty intonations:—"Well, Rawleigh, I, like Miriam, am not frightened, but very pleased."

“You see, a troop of us have come over from Linton to look at the ruins, with no better object than to get a good ride, or to remind our friends that Godfrey de Ufford built a castle and founded a family in this part of the kingdom centuries before any other present proprietor of the county had emerged from the baser clay whence we all sprung. But, as I did not care to hang about a heap of crumbling stones, and feign a modest carelessness about my ancestry, I put my horse in ‘The George’ stables, and after saying how-d’ye-do to Mrs. Cookesley, came on here.”

He made this explanation carelessly in manner, but with the considerate intention of impressing on his cousin that in absenting himself from the pleasure-party he was not depriving himself of a great enjoyment.

“It was really a brilliant pageant!” answered Miss Ufford. “And what a number of beautiful girls it contained! Linton is lucky this year.”

“You know most of them.”

“I knew them at one time. Augusta nodded to me, and waved her hand as she passed.”

“Ah, she rode behind the rest.”

“With Cheveley.”

“Ha, ha! Poor Cheveley!”

“Why *poor* Cheveley? Is he so very unfortunate? In my opinion, Rawleigh, you had better expend your compassion on a fitter object.”

“Positively, Caroline, he is in love with her.”

“And she with him, perhaps.”

Rawleigh laughed merrily at this, and then, looking uneasily at me, he took a letter from his pocket, and said, “Miriam, my beauty, run with this and slip it into the letter-box at the post-office. It is franked, so there will be nothing to pay.”

I of course obeyed his mandate with alacrity, but I saw clearly its object, and I left the room with a smile on my face

and malice at my heart. Why should he tell secrets to her, and not *me*? Why could he not trust *me*? What danger did he expect from revealing to me what he did not hesitate to disclose to her? Such were my thoughts, and in a minute of time a gust of passion swept over me, and left me ready to believe every evil, and wicked, and abominable thing of my dear mistress.

It did not take me long to slip on my bonnet, run to the post with the letter, and get home again. On my return, I stept noiselessly upstairs, and listened to what passed—alternately putting my eye and ear to the key-hole.

“That’s how matters stand,” Rawleigh Ufford was saying; “now tell me what think you of the state of the case?”

“I think she ought to be more open. She has no excuse for stooping to secrecy.”

“Nay, nay, Caroline; don’t be so severe. Her mother is just now in a delicate state of

health, and she does not like to annoy her with opposition. Probably, she will not live another year; indeed, the doctors combine in saying she cannot. In the meantime, Augusta is very young. She will not be mistress of herself and her fortune till next December; but as soon as she is, she will assert her right to choose what husband she likes."

"And in the meantime, what is Cheveley's line of conduct?"

"Poor fellow! he behaves positively like a hero. He has spoken quite frankly to me about the hopelessness of his position, and assures me he shall never try to steal a march on me, for the simple reason that he knows any such attempt would not only be futile, but would rouse in her a violent antagonism towards himself. Consequently, my game is clearly the one I am at present playing. I allow him to hang about her as much as she likes to let him, and keep in the background myself as much as possible, when observers are

present. I don't care about the silly gazers thinking and saying that Cheveley is the lucky man, when, ere twelve months are over, I know how they will be undeceived."

"God bless you, Rawleigh," my mistress replied sweetly, "I sympathize with your triumph. May God make you as happy as I think you deserve to be!"

"Thank you, dear Caroline. Now let's talk about something else."

As Rawleigh Ufford spoke these words, I slipped downstairs to the entrance-passage, slammed the outer door with a bang, and ran upstairs, as if I had just returned from the post-office.

"Well, Miriam," said Rawleigh Ufford, "my cousin has been giving you an excellent character; she says you are as good and surprisingly clever as you are beautiful. Caroline, don't you acknowledge a strong likeness in her to a certain person?"

"I saw it, the first time I saw her, when

she fainted away in my arms. 'Tis an extraordinary resemblance."

"Who is it I am so like, Mr. Ufford?"

As I put this question, there was a renewal of the clatter and noise of hoofs on the hard ground beneath us, and once more the equestrians swept by, at the same brisk pace with which they had made their first appearance. They were now riding in a close, compact body, whereas, when we saw them before, there were spaces of two or three lengths between the companies of twos and threes; and in the centre of the glittering band rode Lord Cheveley and Augusta Wingfield. Truly, she was a superb, queenly girl, fit to be the wife of Rawleigh Ufford! I noticed her flashing eyes, and delicate profile with its short upper lip slightly curled,—not with pride, but made so by a discerning nature to contrast with the counter-curves of her fair cheeks and waxen chin. I marked, too, her large eyes that seemed, in a terrible insolence of power, to dis-

dain displaying themselves in their full brightness ; and it did not escape me that the affluence of glossy eyebrows, and dark ringlets looped up on either side of her ivory temples, resembled mine. As she bounded under our drawing-room window, her horse leaped up skittishly, and she patted its neck with a tiny white-gloved hand, and slackened the rein, as she turned her face upwards, and laughed a greeting to our party in the window.

Twenty yards behind the dazzling throng, cantered four grooms, on bay horses, and clad in the martial livery of the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth. For in the last generation nobles lived with noble pomp. Now they sneak about their own provinces, as if they were ashamed of themselves, and think they display a great deal of courage in facing the public gaze on the platform of a Mechanics' Institute, or at a missionary meeting.

"I must be off," said Rawleigh Ufford, "there's a grand dinner to-day at Linton, and

the Earl allows no one to be late. Farewell, cousin ; mind and write to me as often as ever. Now, Miriam, I shall kiss you once more for old acquaintance's sake."

"And love of Miss Wingfield?"

"What! little witch! you see your likeness?"

"I am not so beautiful as she," I replied.

"But you will be," he answered.

"Thank you, sir," I said gravely.

In another minute he had left us, and the sun in the heavens ceased, as far as I was concerned, to shine, and my heart became very sad.

I looked at my mistress, but there was nothing in her face to show that she was more or less happy than usual. Had it contained one sign of peevishness, or sullenness, or dejection, or anguish, however slight, I would have forgiven her for being the cousin and friend of Rawleigh Ufford. But she was all calmness and composure—as far as I could see,

all cheerfulness. Oh, how her hypocrisy enraged me! I knew her secret as well as she herself did; and yet she would not confide it to me. She thought it right to maintain a reserve to me, just as her friend—her loved one who would not love her—Rawleigh Ufford had thought it right!

Possibly because she saw I was troubled and irritated with her, she withdrew to a table devoted entirely to her use, and occupied herself for hours writing letters. It became dark, and, without being requested to do so, I lighted a candle, and put it before her desk; she thanked me with a smile for this appropriate service, but her smile did not drive the sullen cloud from my brow or the evil temper from my heart. I retired to a corner of the room, and, making pretence to read a book of travels, I brooded over the miseries and hardships of my life, and with much ingenuity satisfied myself that my gentle mistress was leagued with the rest of the world to oppress

me, and was, although in a different way, every whit as bad as Mrs. Muscut.

We had our tea together, without exchanging a score words; and as soon as the dial on the mantel-piece pointed to nine o'clock, I curtly said "Good night," and slipped upstairs to sulk it out handsomely in bed. As I looked round my pretty little sleeping-room, with all its luxuries and comforts, and remembered to whose bounty it was I owed such a habitation, a thought came to me that I was a very wicked, vile, ungrateful girl to harbour resentment and ill-will towards my benefactress. But I gave conscience an opiate by saying, "Pah!—why should I be thankful to her? She is only kind to me, because she wants to please *him*! If he didn't care for me, little enough should I have of her affection! No. Credit to whom credit is due. I'll be grateful to *him*,—not to *her*!"

I had not communed with myself in this amiable and praiseworthy style for more than

an hour, when I heard the door downstairs open; and then I heard the heavy tread of Mr. Ufford stumbling up to his bed-room, assisted by his daughter. The old man was home much earlier than usual. The continued excess of the last fortnight was telling on his nervous energies, and had sent him from the "George" billiard-room thoroughly exhausted with bodily fatigue, ere he had reduced himself to the helplessness of intoxication. My sharp ears noted every sound. When Miss Ufford had led her father into his apartment, and closed the door on him, she paused for a few seconds on the staircase. The rustling of her muslin dress against the wall was speech to me. She was debating what step she should next take. After hesitating for a few seconds, she determined on paying me a visit,—and in a trice her feet sprung lightly up the stairs, and she glided through my door.

My candle was out, and I feigned to be asleep.

“Beauty, are you awake?” she inquired with such silvery tenderness that I was compelled to answer.

“Yes, Miss Ufford.”

“I’ll sit a short time, darling, with you ; for I want to talk to you. You’re unhappy. Something has pained you. Tell me what it is. Don’t be afraid to declare all the truth ; I am prepared to find that I have been somehow to blame. So be of good courage, and don’t be silent through a fear of scolding a kind friend who has tried to benefit you. I want you, when you grow up, to be really and truly my friend,—to be my friend now ; as a friend I have always treated *you* ;—you, on your part, must be equally generous to me. Be frank and open to me. Friends must have nothing of reserve.—Sweet one, what is it?”

I tried to answer her, but I could not. My lips trembled, my throat choked, a tremor seized my entire body, and uncon-

sciously I threw my arms out into the darkness, but when they fell down and closed again, they encircled Miss Ufford's neck, and she was kissing my face as I sobbed out my confession—of madness and anguish:—

“I could not bear to see you with Mr. Rawleigh Ufford. I could not bear to see you care so much for him, and see him care so much for you, and so little for me. I could not bear to have him kiss me, and then find out he only did it because I was like some one else. And I couldn't help hating you when I thought how you would laugh at me, and despise me, and reject me, and cast me off, if you knew what a little fool I was. Now laugh at me; I know I'm only a little maid-servant, a miserable beggar-girl maid-servant, who tried once to murder a woman; and you are a lady, high above me; and he is a magnificent gentleman, higher, higher, higher still above me. Now scorn me.”

But she would not obey my command.

Instead of ridiculing my folly, she drew me closer to her, put my head on her bosom, rocked me to and fro, stroked my hair with her hands, and cherished me in a thousand loving ways. And when I became calmer, she said :—

“Darling, I am glad you have said everything that was in your heart. I thank you very fervently for your goodness in treating me with such confidence, and I shall hereafter always love you as a part of my life. Your being only a servant is no reason why you should not love my cousin Rawleigh. It might be a reason why he could not, without grave consideration, think of making you his wife ; but it can be none why the promptings of your heart should be disdained either by him or me. Miriam, you are different from any other girl of your age I have ever seen. You have more intelligence and wisdom than fall to the lot of most clever women ; you feel acutely ; both in head and heart you are a

woman, and I should not deserve the name of one if I were unable to sympathize with you in your bitter grief. But never again distrust me, lovely pet, not for an instant, in anything ; and, to show you why I am beyond all other persons the one to be confided in by you, just now I will tell you a story. Shall I ? ”

She remained silent for more than a minute ; but during that time the rustling of her light dress, and a scarcely perceptible movement of the air, indicated that she was making a strong effort to compose her agitated nerves, and to reveal to me a cautiously-guarded secret.

“ I will tell you, Miriam,” she said in clear, low, deliberate accents, manifesting no mental disturbance, except that she spoke slowly, and in short sentences, and paused frequently, not for emphasis, but for rest—“ I will tell you, Miriam, of a certain cousin of Rawleigh’s, whom he has been very kind to, and who would willingly lay down her life to do him good. She was his playmate, when she was a little child, and he a

manly lad on the point of leaving Eton and going to college. Their intercourse was familiar, as is usual with near relations of the same age, and brought up under the same roof. Possibly had the nature of the little girl been fully understood and appreciated by the kind relatives who supplied the place of her dead mother, precautions would have been taken against putting her so completely under the influence of her cousin, and so much after-sorrow would have been avoided. But she was such a very child, such a mere inmate of the nursery, that no one thought of protecting her from the danger of premature or misplaced affection. But the danger, nevertheless, existed, and the calamity befell her. She was not older than you when she loved Rawleigh Ufford, passionately, as she has done ever since.

“Domestic trouble fell upon this girl. Her father met with misfortune and reproaches; he was excluded from all intercourse with his family; and in his old age, after a life of

pleasure, and magnificence, and prosperity, he had to live in a little cottage, not retired from observation, but under the cruel blaze of his family's splendour, on a small pittance, grudgingly bestowed. It seemed right to the child, of whom we are speaking, to accompany her father, and share his privations and—what the world would call—disgrace. After a little angry opposition, the members of her family coldly acquiesced, and permitted her to act in accordance with her sense of right; but from the time that she commenced doing so, all her kindred proudly—I will not say unfeelingly, for they felt deeply—withdrew their countenance from her, and left her to follow her course in loneliness, unsupported, unencouraged.

“There was one exception. The girl had one friend. Her old playmate and cousin, Rawleigh, was true to her. He was poor—as young men, the cadets of great families, usually are—and he was burdened with the

expenses of an extravagant college life, and then of a yet more extravagant regiment; but he denied himself enjoyments to surround his luckless little cousin with some of the comforts to which she had been accustomed. He did not know how she loved him; he has never suspected it. Had he, in kindness he would have been less kind; and that, this poor girl could not have borne. Maidenly dignity, from the first, made her jealously keep the secret of her heart from his observation; and now her love of him would of itself be a sufficient motive to her for continuing to conceal it. If he for one instant had suspected the condition of her affections, he would, any day before last Friday, have surrendered all his ambitious dreams, and all his ardent love for a more brilliant, and, doubtless, a better—certainly a happier—woman, and in commiseration have made this simple girl his wife.

“But no misfortune would be so terrible to her as his making this sacrifice. I tell you,

Miriam, she would rather die by her own hand than injure him by causing him to love her. No, she has her secrets : the secret of her love, and the secret of her willingness to prefer his good to her own. He will never discover them in this world, but perchance in the next—where all the good live, and love, and thoroughly know each other—he will become acquainted with them, and, maybe, even some portion of his heavenly joy will consist in reflecting that such unobtrusive, unsuspected love surrounded him in his existence here.

“Miriam, my darling child, I am your companion, friend, and sister in suffering.”

She remained by my side, sitting in the dark room for many minutes—certainly twenty ; then, in the same gentle tones, but now in the first person, she resumed her speech, and added a few brief sentences to her narrative. She told me, in strict confidence, what I had learnt hours before, that Rawleigh Ufford loved, and

would ere long marry, the rich and beautiful heiress, Miss Augusta Wingfield.

“So you see, sweet,” she added with touching gentleness, “mine has been a cloudy day; for I am ashamed to say cousin Rawleigh’s success—though it is in truth my triumph—cost me a pang. But we must not be dejected at our minor selfish troubles. Brighter days will come.”

“I don’t think so, Miss Ufford. I believe we, all the days of our lives, shall be covered with sorrows.”

“Then we must bear them bravely. God has given His creatures many means whereby to find comfort in their woes; we must be prudent enough to look to them.”

“But this is very sad. I want to *enjoy* myself. And you tell me to *endure*, all the days of my life.”

“All the days of *this* life. Yes, during *them* we may have to suffer, but with hope; for, Miriam, I have a faith that has afforded me

much solace: it is, that the sorrows of this life, rightly treated, come to be the joys of the next."

As she said this, she rose and noiselessly quitted the room, leaving me in the darkness and solemn stillness.

CHAPTER III.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS.

THE particulars we confided to each other on the evening which has just been described were never again discussed by Miss Ufford and myself. On a few, and only a few, occasions we alluded to them, as matters that we both dwelt upon much in thought, and as bonds of intimate union between us; but we avoided them in conversation, as subjects too solemn to be frequently touched on even in our own words.

But from that evening my mistress changed her manner to me,—substituting the language of that warm affection that ought to subsist amongst companions who are equals for her previous tone of gentle beneficence and patronage. I was gradually led to address her by her Christian name, instead of her surname. In every particular we treated each other as sisters,—she directing me as the elder, but without any of the severity of authority, and I conversing with her at all moments, and on all subjects, save the two tacitly forbidden ones of Rawleigh and her father, with a freedom and ease such as I had never before maintained in my bearing towards any living creature.

The Linton holidays *came to a conclusion soon after the excursion to Dunwich Castle. We saw the carriages of the great lords and ladies whirled through the town in the direction of London, and none came the downward road with guests to supply the places of the de-

parted ones. We had, also, a flying visit of farewell from Rawleigh Ufford, who, after spending an hour with us, chatting and laughing with his customary frankness, and giving us numerous particulars about Miss Augusta Wingfield's doings, took his place, well wrapped and overcoated, on the box of the mail, and was by that vehicle in due course transported to the metropolis. I accompanied him, at my mistress's request, to the door of "The George," where the mail changed horses. We arrived too early for the coach, and passed twenty minutes in gossiping with Mrs. Cookesley, who was such a truly kind woman that I never in after-life resented her having seen me in the condition of a beggar girl. After a while, however, the mail drawn by four horses turned the corner, and stopped before "The George." A hurrying crowd of ostlers, children, passengers wanting places, and passengers who had descended for the purpose of getting refreshment, was soon formed round the carriage ; when, to

my surprise, Mr. Ufford's servant, Watson, emerged from some corner of concealment, and saluting his master respectfully informed him that the luggage was already stowed away in the fore-boot.

The man's quick eyes fell on me, and I knew he recognised me instantly, but by no sign in them, or his pale hard face, or his large straggling lips, did he manifest surprise at my altered appearance, or even show that he was aware of my presence. But his silent and stolid behaviour to me did not deceive me; and the fancy came into my head that he both knew, and was well pleased at knowing, that his manner did not mislead me. We looked each other full in the face,—I bravely and without flinching; he, as impudently as he dared in the presence of his master. But the effrontery of his stare was simply that which an insolent man might bestow on a total stranger.

“There's an inside place, sir,” observed

Watson, again touching his hat obsequiously.

“ I don’t want it. The box is booked for me,” was the answer.

“ Yes, sir,—exactly so, sir,—but I thought this young lady might be going.”

“ No. This lady does not travel to-day. Now, get up behind. The coach will be off in an instant.”

As Rawleigh Ufford said these words, curtly and imperiously, to his servant, he led me a few steps out of the crowd, and remarked to me, “ You see, Miriam, you’re so altered that my man does not recognise you.”

“ He knows me, sir,” I answered fiercely ;—
“ he’s as crafty and dishonest as a cat.”

“ No, no,—you mistake him, Miriam. Don’t think evil of others, and so you yourself perhaps may escape unjust judgment. But I wont scold you. Be a good girl, and make it your business to love my cousin Caroline.”

“ I will, sir.”

“ And then, if you have any love left and to spare,—give it me.”

“ I will, sir.”

“ Ere long, those words spoken by you will make a man think himself a lucky fellow.”

“ You’ll never forget, come what may, that I was — what I was,” I hissed out venomously.

“ Why should I ? ” he answered.

But there was no time in which to prolong conversation. The coachman came out of “ The George,” and slowly walked past us, inspecting the lash of his whip, and repeating audibly :—

“ Now, gentlemen, time up ! ”

In ten seconds more he had mounted to the box, and Rawleigh Ufford was by his side. The head ostler stepped aside from the heads of the leaders, and the helpers snatched the cloths off the horses’ backs ; and ere I could recover myself enough to know that I had been fool

enough to put myself in a passion with my benefactor, the mail was out of sight. Ere it disappeared, however, I saw Watson sitting at the back, with eyes upon me, and nodding a familiar farewell.

I walked back to Laburnum Cottage, and in half an hour was saying a dozen French verbs to my mistress.

I had begun that language. During the dull, monotonous months of spring, I worked at it with a resolute determination, and ere the close of the year I not only jabbered habitually to my dear mistress the same ungrammatical jargon of Gallic Anglicisms which young ladies at fashionable boarding-schools deem to be French Conversation, but I also had read, besides "The Exiles of Siberia" and Telemachus, considerable portions of Voltaire, Racine, Scuderi, Molière, and Corneille. Indeed, I devoured books; not, it must frankly be acknowledged, for any pure enjoyment they afforded me, but from mingled motives of curiosity and ambition.

Besides this acquisition of learning, I made myself mistress of an accomplishment that gave me sincere pleasure as an artist. I was very fond of hearing Miss Ufford sing. She had a fine voice, of unusual richness and compass, and she used it, as she did all her other endowments, with true poetic feeling. I was never tired of listening to her, as, accompanying herself on her piano (the present of cousin Rawleigh), she poured forth, in one prolonged but varied flow of melody, old English and Scotch ballads, merry French impertinences, German love-songs, and passages from Italian operas. The numerous airs she sang became a part of my thoughts, and unconsciously, under the strong infection of art, I began to hum and trill them while working about the house, or playing cards with Mr. Ufford.

“Caroline,” said I suddenly one day, “why don’t you keep your word, and teach your little girl to sing?”

“My little girl (by the way, you are more than half a head taller than I am), I have already taught you to sing.”

“You have not given me one lesson.”

“Miriam! Miriam! have you neither gratitude nor justice? When you first came to me, could you sing at all, or hum the simplest tune with which a housemaid lightens her toil? And are you not now at all times, when you have not a book in your hands, trilling and quavering away like a prima donna? How would you have acquired that much of the art you covet if I had not imparted it to you?”

What she said was quite true. Without scarcely being aware of it, I had been for months educating my ear and voice.

“But you are right, dear,” added my mistress, “you must now be taught systematically. But your voice must not be overtaxed. Every day you shall have one half-hour’s lesson in singing. And in addition to this you shall

devote one hour to learning to play on the piano."

I need not say I was a delighted and enthusiastic pupil. But my industry and passion to excel were powerless to make me an instrumental performer. As my mistress assured me beforehand would be the case, the joints of my fingers and the muscles of my hands never acquired that pliancy and strength which are requisite for a merely tolerable pianist, and which are never attained to by those who have not in early youth accustomed themselves to the management of musical instruments.

But my age was no obstacle to my becoming a superior vocalist. Indeed, under the circumstances, it was in my favour, as the fibres of my larynx had never been strained by any premature use of the magnificent "organ" (as singing-masters call it) with which nature had enriched me.

It was well for me that I applied myself so

enthusiastically to acquiring the arts which women in polite society are expected to possess ; for, apart from the pleasure and substantial good my acquirements have been to me in life, I should have found time hang heavily on my hands at Aldeburgh without such pursuits.

The town, indeed, contained little that was lively, and the position I and my mistress held in it shut us out from what little society it possessed. Not from pride, though such a motive would have been pardonable, but from the purest considerations of womanly delicacy and propriety, Miss Ufford never took any part in the amusements of the place. She was personally acquainted with all the little gentry, the clergymen, and lawyers, and doctors, and wealthier merchants in the borough, and was always ready in public to respond cordially to the good-will and greetings of them and their families ; but she knew well that her cottage was no fit place, and her father no fit host, for the reception of the simple gentlewomen who

presided over "the upper tone" of Aldeburgh. It was best that we should live in perfect seclusion, and we did so, never accepting or receiving an invitation to spend an evening in a neighbour's house, and never interchanging words with our fellow-inhabitants of the borough, save when we encountered them going to or coming from church, or in our walks to the sea-shore, and on the wild heath that surrounded Dunwich Castle.

It was therefore fortunate for me in every respect that I was able to extract happiness from the resources of my own mind and Laburnum Cottage.

The first six months of the year, as they drearily fought it out with wet and blustering east winds, were diversified to me and my mistress by scarcely any incidents, except the arrivals of the monthly boxes, sent by Rawleigh Ufford from London, containing new music and books. They were Miss Ufford's principal society, and some may think no bad society, since

they comprehended in their number the novels of Scott, and Edgeworth, the poems of Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey and Moore, the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews—in the days when the writers in those Reviews were the most original and profound thinkers of their time, and not merely second-rate journalists. And I am sure I am not going to oppose those who are of opinion that solitude, forty years since, with the writings of Wilson and his contemporaries, was preferable to the most brilliant society of the Court. Still it puzzled me how Caroline Ufford could bear her life so cheerfully as she did. I was continually conjuring up scenes of splendour, such as I imagined those to be which she had a kind of birth-right to adorn, and then I contrasted them with the narrow sphere and painful duties in which her days were spent. Had I been she, it was settled in my mind, I could never have submitted to the privation, and neglect, and social degradation she voluntarily

encountered. What claim had such a father on any child for such sacrifice? I would have left him in the mud and defilement in which he loved to wallow, and would have clung to that brilliant world from which he, for his vices and dishonour, had been ejected ; nor would I, in my mistress's place, have meekly consented to have yielded the man I loved up to a rival—simply because she was beautiful and wealthy. With all my disadvantages and drawbacks, I would have entered the lists, and matched myself against this admired prize of all womanhood. What a victory it would have been to have won *him*, in spite of all obstacles, to have vanquished *her* in spite of her charmed armour! Rather than have failed, I would have disregarded every sentiment of dignity or self-respect. To the winds with all disdain—at being accepted as *his* wife *out* of pity, if such a bargain was the only way of preventing his taking *her out* of love!

At times I was positively enraged with my

mistress for her mild resignation, her cowardly surrender. Surely she did not love him as I did! Or was it that she experienced all the bitterness of anger and hate to Miss Augusta Wingfield that rankled in my breast, and avoided the contest merely from craven fear? And was her life of seeming goodness and freedom from selfishness only a cloak behind which she hid her disappointment and humiliation? Could it be that she—instead of being frank and guileless—was a greater hypocrite than myself?

In the monthly boxes there were always collections of the best papers, of all sides in politics, and selected by Rawleigh Ufford with the view of giving his cousin a complete and impartial acquaintance with all public proceedings. From these we learnt that he had been elected to serve in the House of Commons as member for a small borough. This was an exciting piece of intelligence, and compelled my mistress to break away from her customary

self-restraint and with burning words to say that he would soon cause the world to acknowledge his remarkable powers, and to draw a distinction between him and Lord Cheveley, his cousin, who had sat in the Lower House for ten years, for Aldeburgh, the Earl's pocket borough, and had never dared to open his lips. Next month's box brought us a strong verification of this prophecy ; for the young member without delay made his maiden speech, with an effect that startled the best gladiators of the arena, and made them hail the newly-arrived knight as one of no ordinary prowess, though his oration was boldly directed against the reigning Cabinet. The prime minister himself, in his reply at the close of the debate, paid a generous tribute of praise to the commanding logic and nervous eloquence of his young adversary's address. And, in addition to this, the journals had distinct articles on the speech, and criticised it with an earnestness that was the best possible certificate of its merits. How we

women read and re-read that maiden speech and those articles,—weeks after their first delivery to the public,—weeks after the public had begun to forget them !

Sometimes a letter came to my mistress from Rawleigh Ufford. These epistles were few, but long ones. I never saw them, but she would read me short pieces of them,—just enough to keep me from bursting with jealousy at her having any confidence with him in which I did not partake. I would have given much, had I possessed much, to have known all that those budgets contained, or even to have had a general intimation of what the topics were they treated of, whether they imparted intelligence of Miss Augusta Wingfield's movements, or of his own prospects of political advancement ; but I was too prudent, if not too reasonable, to think of forcing my mistress to communicate to me more particulars than she voluntarily told me.

When the summer came, we spent a great

deal of time out of doors; sometimes we sat on the shingle, by the sea-surge, Miss Ufford musing to herself, and watching 'the seas labouring the births of seas,' and I conning my French books, or devouring the Waverley novels. Frequently we made short excursions into the country—in a pony-chaise, drawn by an old white pony—which Mrs. Cookesley of "The George" Inn generously put at her "dear Miss Caroline's" service. These were delightful occasions. We always took with us refreshment for the day, and starting off in the early morning did not return till evening. Our plan usually was to drive slowly through the lanes to some point of picturesque interest in the neighbourhood,—a ruined abbey, a church, an ancient farmstead, an old embattled hall, a clump of trees, a mill-stream, or some such object. Our destination reached, and our pony put up in some hospitable farmer's stable, Miss Ufford would take out her crayons, or water-colours, and pass the hours, seated on a shady bank,

and enjoying an artist's tranquil pleasures, whilst I would either ramble about gathering flowers, or, lying by my friend's side, would read aloud to her in French or English—for my own improvement, rather than for her delight.

One fine clear day at the end of August, my mistress came early to the door of my bedroom, and rousing me cheerily, said, “Miriam, don't be a sluggard. This is an excursion day, Mrs. Cookesley can let us have the pony, and I will take you somewhere.”

“Oh, where,—where is it, Caroline?” I exclaimed, jumping from my bed.

“Somewhere — somewhere — inquisitive Miriam!” returned my mistress, laughing.

It was one of those peerless days which make the close of August and opening of September in this country the most charming part of the year. We drove through a succession of shady lanes, that threaded each other with an intricacy that put me in mind of Rosamond's bower. At length, after driving

at least six miles, we allowed our pony to climb slowly up a high hill, on gaining the summit of which, we beheld a scene—not of grandeur, but true English beauty. There lay before us an undulating park, well wooded with oak and maple, and elm and fir, and comprising within the circuit of its paling two ridges of gentle ascents rather than hills, and an intermediate valley, along which ran a stream that at certain points, where its banks had been widened and lowered by artificial means, extended into imposing sheets of water. Dotting this miniature lake were small islands for wild fowl to shelter in ; on either side of it deer were seen wandering about leisurely and without fear ; and far off, midway up the more distant hill's ascent, flanked and embosomed by a lordly luxuriance of giant timber and dark foliage, rose the spire-pointed gables of an Elizabethan mansion. The house was not large—indeed it was small for the park in which it was placed—but

there pervaded it an airy lightness and grace not usually found in the massive buildings of the period to which it belonged.

"This is beautiful! this is beautiful!" I exclaimed in an ecstasy.

"I thought you would like it."

"It ought to belong to a fairy queen."

"It does."

"Whose is it?"

"It is Braden Manor."

"What! Miss Wingfield's?"

"Yes; it is Augusta's."

I was silent for several seconds, and so was my mistress, who, however, broke the pause by observing composedly: "She is not here at present, but she is expected to visit this lovely spot in a few days; so I thought it would be a good plan for us to spend some hours in walking about and sketching in the park, while no one would be nigh to observe us; for we need both of us have a few pleasant associations with Braden, and a serene day

like this will assist us to obtain them. Braden Manor will be Rawleigh's home one day.

This was the first day since the evening of our memorable confidence that my mistress had touched so directly on the relative position of ourselves, her cousin, and Augusta Wingfield. As I have said before, she guardedly abstained from that topic, though she frequently allowed herself, and encouraged me, to speak of Rawleigh Ufford's talents, and eloquence, and fame; and, even now, beyond the brief announcement that we were driving over Miss Wingfield's estate, she did not permit herself to pursue the subject.

To apply to my studies in the open air that day was impossible. As soon as we had consigned our pony and chaise to the keeper of the lodge (who knew Miss Ufford, and was well pleased to do her the service of taking care of our modest equipage), and I had seen my mistress settled in a shady spot, sketching a clump of Scotch firs that leaned forward

over an old lock-gate, down which an overflow of the Braden waters fell with a brawling rattle, I left my books by her side, and went off for a solitary ramble in the park.

I wandered down rustling avenues, over velvet turf and scorched pasturage, round about fairy rings, and across the fine black soil of mole-hills. I watched the rare water-fowl, billing and gabbling with each other, and plashing about the sparkling water, and I followed the shadows of flitting clouds as they sailed with gossamer quietness over the grass. Then I sat down beneath a silver-leaved ilex, where I had a good view of the Manor House, lying calmly embedded in shrubberies of yew and Portugal laurel, and smooth lawns, and bright terraces, over the flowers, and statues, and fountains of which scores of dark cedars, planted possibly by crusaders, when an older hall occupied the foundations of Augusta Wingfield's mansion, stood in sombre stillness.

How hard it seemed to me that some

should have so much and others so little—that Augusta Wingfield should have been born to the inheritance of such wealth, and I should be a dependant on another's bounty! What had she done to deserve such pre-eminence? Why had not God divided more equally, more justly, his blessings to his creatures? Or, if there must be “high” and “low” in the ranks of this world, why had not I been called to the former and she to the latter?

I was thus musing bitterly, and with the venom of envy in my heart, when I saw silently rise from the centre of the battlemented and gabled roof of the Manor House a crimson flag, that unfolded even during its ascent, and fluttered in the balmy breeze. In the centre of the banner were tricked the arms of Wingfield. Watching this pretty toy that had risen to diversify the scene with a silence which seemed almost mysterious, and now waved with lazy fluctuations over the

mansion, in and around which there were none of the common signs of human life—no smoke curling up to the blue sky, no servants on the terraces, no noise of any kind, save the cawing and songs of birds and the hum of insects, I remained under the ilex for half an hour longer, and then sauntered off to the verge of the park, till I turned round into a riding-path that ran along under the palings and under the shade of the skirting timber, and slowly proceeded to wind my way back to the spot where I had left my mistress.

“Oh, Martin, how sweetly the park, and house, and everything about the place looks ! I’ll never leave it again,” said a clear, musical voice behind me, as I wended my way under a row of black-thorn.

“I wish you’d always be in the same mind, my lady,” replied Martin, and as his words reached me, there also fell on my ears the hollow sound of horses’ feet firmly beating the turf, at a foot pace.

In another instant, there hurried into the riding-path from the park-side of the black-thorns Miss Wingfield, riding the same high-bred horse, in colour black, and in shape of faultless delicacy, that I had seen her mounted on several months before. A little behind her, but with his right hand almost within reach of her bridle, on a strong, steady hunter, rode Martin—an old white-headed groom, whom, out of respect for his grey hairs or fidelity of service, it was the lady's pleasure to treat with an easy confidence of manner,—almost verging on familiarity. They were a picturesque couple,—he in a short-skirted coat of puce cloth, belted at the waist with a broad band of leather, a hunting-cap, white breeches, and boots,—with his venerable face inclined forwards, rather more than enough to harmonize with the stoop in his shoulders, in order to catch the light accents of his mistress's voice; she in a well-fitting habit, made for use in hot weather, of some fabric of white linen, and

bountifully ornamented with braid, and with her brows shaded by a riding-hat, with an ample verge, and furnished with a blue gauze veil, such as dandies wear on dusty race-courses.

I stepped behind one of the black-thorns to escape her observation, but ere I could do so her eye fell on me, and I was aware that she had seen me. With a natural dislike to appear afraid of looking her full in the face, and stung with the inherent pride of bashfulness at having really for a few seconds shrunk from her gaze, I stepped from the nook in which I had sought concealment, and in extreme mental confusion almost ran upon the fore-legs of her courageous horse.

"My dear girl," she cried, checking the noble creature, and making it rear back from the curb, "take care. I would not ride over anything so beautiful as you."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Wingfield," said I, composedly, all my nerve returning to me

in an instant, "but I was hurried and frightened at seeing you so close upon me, and I did not see where I was going."

"Surely not frightened at me? I am nothing so terrible?"

"Oh, no!—nothing so terrible that one need fear you," I returned quickly, with a curl on my lip. "But you disturbed me, and sent my thoughts flying. The report of a gun fired off, close to me, would have upset me in the same way."

"I beg your pardon."

"You need not do that. Surely Miss Wingfield has a right to ride in her own park."

"You couldn't punish her for trespass, if you mean that sort of right. But tell me, young lady, who you are. I don't know your face. (I am sure I shan't forget it again.) I should say that you are the eldest daughter of my new rector. But I was not told that he had a lovely girl like yourself."

“I am not the rector’s daughter.”

“Excuse me, my dear girl, if I have offended you. I am accustomed to do what I like, and give myself the airs of a queen down here.”

“My name is Miriam Copley.”

As I uttered my name, the lady gave me a smile of welcome, so cordial and fascinating and bewitchingly inspiring that, had she been a queen, such a smile would alone have induced whole armies to perish gladly in her cause.

“Then, my dear, I know you, and am delighted to see you,” she said with a hearty frankness of tone, that startled me by its contrast to the bell-like notes of her ordinary voice. “To be sure. You’re Miriam Copley. I could not fancy who you were like, and now I find it’s myself you resemble. I look in my glass sometimes. I wouldn’t, though, if I always had you for a companion. Where is your mistress—Caroline Ufford?”

“Miss Ufford is making a sketch, near the spot where the water falls over the lock-gates,” I answered.

“I shall find her. Follow me, and come and sit with us, beautiful one! Here, take that flower; it is not prettier than you are.”

As she spoke she leaned forwards, and plucking from the bosom of her riding-habit a rich spray of oleander, she handed it to me with another smile, as sweet as the almond odour of the blossoms.

She passed on, only at a foot pace, but her horse was a fast walker, and she was soon out of sight. When I next beheld her, she was sitting with the skirt of her habit folded by her side, on the bank, near my mistress, and was saying to Martin, who stood at a distance of a few paces, “Take the horses home, Martin, and tell them to put some lunch for us in the hall. We shall be ready for it in half an hour. And do you come back and meet us with the pony phaeton, we shall walk round by the dove-cote.”

“I did not anticipate this pleasure, Augusta,” observed my mistress. “I heard you were not expected home till next week.”

“Nor was I. Mamma is still at Storton Park, but I became so restless with the silly people there, and pined so for another look at dear old Braden, that I started off in one of my independent freaks, with no one in my train but old Martin and my maid, Rose, and arrived here late last night.”

“Your flag was not flying when we arrived.”

“No,—it was sent up when I passed under the gateway for my morning ride. That is our custom.”

“I saw it ascend. It was delightful to see it mount up and unfold so silently, and apparently without the help of any man!” said I.

“Did you, Miriam?” responded Miss Wingfield cordially, and evidently wishing to express to my mistress that it was her sovereign humour to treat me as a friend, not as a servant.

My mistress was several minutes ere she

had completed her sketch to her satisfaction, and by the time she had closed her portefeuille and shut up her pencil-case, old Martin arrived with an open phaeton, drawn by a pair of superb gray ponies.

“You see you have had to come the whole way for us,” observed Augusta cheerily to her servant. “We are lazy people. And now, Martin, take us quickly round the park, so that we may have a glimpse of all the best views,—and then home. But be quick,—for we mayn’t keep lunch waiting too long, or Mrs. Housekeeper will scold me for being a naughty child when I get home.”

I could not help noticing to myself the ease and high bearing of the heiress’s urbanity,—the exquisite good taste which made her infuse into her very words of authority a savour of childish docility, and the desire she manifested to make the influence of her personal position instrumental to giving pleasure to those around her. I was glad to be necessitated to give

her this tribute of admiration ; it gratified me to be assured that my lord and hero would marry, not only a rich and nobly-descended lady, but one also of peerless beauty and queenly bearing, whom he loved with all the pure passion of a chivalric nature. Yes, even in my jealousy, there was pleasure in being assured of this. I was rejoiced to learn that Augusta Wingfield was one who would have inspired him with love, had she not possessed one single acre of land, or one solitary piece of gold.

But her personal charms and her graceful demeanour of polite urbanity did not impose on me. She was like me in person ; so, also, she resembled me in mind and disposition. In intellect, a voice whispered to me I was her superior—but only in possessing greater general strength, not in having any distinct qualities of which she was devoid ; in temper, aspiration, spiritual texture, we were exactly alike. She was impulsive, affectionate, poetical, com-

passionate, within certain limits, and under certain conditions: so was I. I was cold, crafty, calculating, selfish, ambitious, unscrupulous, resolute, courageous;—so was she.

I saw all this in her features, at rest and in motion, in the classic correctness of her language, and dress, and style; in all her winning ways of smile, and laugh, and repartee; in all her subdued coquetries of voice, and glance, and diction; in the grace of her waxen limbs, and every element of her devilish beauty. At every instant some portion of this lesson was instilled into or impressed upon me; as we glided down avenues of beech, and oak, chestnut and lime; as we darted over the bridges of the park-water, or frightened the timid deer in their distant seclusion; as we passed through long galleries, from the gloomy wainscot of whose walls the portraits of her family worthies looked down on us; as we inspected suites of magnificent drawing-rooms, where costly dra-

peries of every hue, cabinets of jewels, and gemmed miniatures and toys, vied with gleaming mirrors, painted panels, the resplendent flash of gilding, and the cool whiteness of marble statues, in charming the senses of vision; as we strolled down terraces where fountains played, and marble vases raised to the eye rich masses of scarlet geranium, brilliantly contrasting with the green sward of the lawns on which beds of less obtrusive flowers sparkled, and which were bordered with darkling cedars and firs, under whose branches, in dim recesses, we continually came upon a leering satyr in marble, or a cool Venus with sea-foam still wet on her rounded limbs, feigning timidity and surprise, and coyly hinting at the one good thing of life.

We lunched in the large hall, which was the principal apartment on the ground floor of the mansion, occupying two-thirds of the centre portion, its folding-doors on one side opening on the pile of steps which descended into the

park, and its French windows on the opposite side, affording a view of the flowers, green plots, flashing fountains, and works of sculpture, which ornamented the principal terrace. As we entered, on our right lay the doors leading to the library, dining, billiard, and breakfast-rooms; on the left, were the drawing-rooms. I had never been in such an imposing habitation before. The floor of the hall was composed of large slabs of black and white marble; the walls, that ran right up to a vaulted roof of light walnut elaborately carved, were of black oak, and were hung with pictures of the chase and hawking in tapestry, suits of armour, and hunting-trophies.

In the centre of the hall was a space of some ten feet square, occupied by a piece of Indian matting, on which were put chairs, and a table set out with glass, and china, and plate for our luncheon. The place looked so cool and airy, and the breeze came in through the open glass doors with such merry softness, that to

be there, seeing, and feeling, and hearing, was refreshment enough, without any other repast.

“And what think you of my home, Miriam?” asked Augusta Wingfield, after we had lunched, putting down on the table a glass of iced water, which an instant before had been touching her lips. “Can’t you pay it a compliment? I don’t care for flattery, myself; but I like to hear kind things said of old Braden.”

“I think you must be very happy,” was my answer, “and ought to be very good.”

“Nay, nay, child. You surely don’t think the possession of such a fine place as this gives happiness or virtue? ’Tis but a temptation to pride, selfishness, insolent ambition. What so great a peril as wealth?”

“Poverty,” I said quietly, but in a manner that made the brilliant heiress know I was not a child or plaything, and caused my mistress to glance at me anxiously with her blue eyes.

“Think you so, indeed?” laughed Miss Wingfield in reply. “Then I am more excellent than you?”

“Nay, I did not say so. You have lived longer than I, and consequently have had more time to sin in. Possibly, you have availed yourself of this opportunity. And it is also just possible that you have not resisted temptation, and I have; though *you* are a lady blessed with affluence, of high degree, and courted, as the prosperous are sure to be; whilst I am only raised above a maid-servant by what a benevolent mistress has in her goodness endowed me with.”

“This child is admirable,” cried the heiress, holding forth, at the end of a blue-veined neck, her delicate, oval face, scarce bigger than a swan’s egg, glowing with amusement and mischief; “she is a perfect treasure, Caroline! Sell her to me. I would give my diamond necklace for her.”

“The parrot is not for sale yet,” I an-

swered quickly, for my mistress; "it's under training now, but when its education is completed, it will be put up in the market for disposal to the highest bidder. And then, you'll do well to buy it without delay, for its price will increase rapidly. It'll be a high-prized parrot, one day; may-be, before it dies, it will have a cage like other luckier parrots."

"Saucy one, I like your boldness; and excuse your calling me a parrot in a cage. But, since I have had such a taste of your quality, I wont bid for you, or become mistress of you on any terms."

"Why so?"

"Your plumage is too much like mine, and your voice is as rich and varied as a nightingale's—while I can only scream, or jabber in parrot fashion what others teach me."

"You and Miriam," put in my mistress gravely, recalling us to our senses, and checking me in my folly, "were speaking just now of temptation as a power existing in external

circumstances. You were wrong in doing so. What we term the temptation of external circumstances is only the reflection we see in them of our evil passions,—just as the encouragement, and support, and protection of external circumstances are only names we give to that pleasant sense of self-approval which we experience, when we see in the outer world the enlivening and re-assuring portraiture of our own inner excellences. And I believe all sets of circumstances are equally well adapted to act this part of a moral mirror.”

“Your philosophy is a sublime one, if it is able to make you so superior to circumstances,—so insensible to their influence. I don’t read books, and spend my time in thinking, as you do, Caroline, but I am bold enough to say that your pretty sentences contain as much error as our bitter ones. As an off-hand opinion, I should say that a certain class of external circumstances are in-

jurious to our spiritual nature, just as certain external influences are hostile to our physical condition. Fresh air, unbroken rest, and a wholesome diet are good things for the body ; in the same degree that an impure atmosphere, a short allowance of sleep, and meagre food are the sure parents of disease. And it will be difficult for you to prove that flattery and luxury on the one hand, or scorn and never-ending toil on the other, are not hurtful agents."

Miss Wingfield spoke this with a gravity and earnestness that she had not before displayed.

"I either overstated my case, or you are subjecting to a literal interpretation what I only intended to be a general expression of opinion,—that we often attribute to external causes effects which they have in no way produced, but have only illustrated. At least the two powers act and re-act with equal force. If the outer world can to a certain

degree determine the thoughts of the inner, the inner can infuse its own colour into the outer. And if adverse circumstances sometimes crush a feeble nature, they are quite as often vanquished by a strong will."

"But then," responded Augusta, adroitly shifting the question, "'tis only a few who have strong wills. What are poor mortals who are infirm of purpose to do?"

"Their best," softly replied Caroline Ufford; "and, guided by that sense of duty which lives in the breast of every rightly-educated human being, they will meet with some degree of success,—at least, not with complete failure."

"Duty! duty! I don't like the word," answered Augusta, laughing and shaking her ringlets, and with one hand plucking a grape from a purple bunch before her; "'tis a sound of cold comfort and harsh counsel. There's something heartless and unfeeling in the way that 'duty' is bandied about in this

wretched world. One-half the miserable people, good people vex themselves about, have no duty assigned them by Providence — except making puddings and darning stockings. How are they to extract comfort from such occupations ? ”

“ By making puddings and darning stockings in the best possible way, resting assured that they should be contented with such humble duties, since Providence has allotted them no higher ones. ‘ They serve, too, who only stand and wait ! ’ You remember Milton ? ”

“ Oh, of course, dear ; though I have never read his books. Well, Miriam, what think you of the look-out on life your mistress presents you with ? ”

Miriam held her tongue ; so did her mistress.

“ Come, here is a case for you, learned Caroline,” cried the spoilt beauty, after a minute’s pause : “ a girl has had the misfortune to love deeply, and with lasting passion,

a man who loves and weds elsewhere ; she has not one of those convenient hearts which break immediately a blow is given them, but she lives on, with life robbed of all its bloom and fresh perfume,—disconsolate, unmated. What is such a one to do? Don't teaze me by saying 'her duty.' What *is her duty?* ”

“ In general terms I should reply, her duty would be at first to think as little as possible of her own grief, and as much as possible of that of others ; afterwards, to care as little as possible about her own individual pleasure, and to be as active as possible in adding to the common stock of happiness. In a large number of cases it will be her duty to make an effort to free herself from the associations of early sorrow ; to begin life afresh—not with her former hopefulness and ardour, but in calm reliance on a Power superior to any mortal aid. It will frequently happen, though she may never again be able to love as she loved for the first time, that

duty will enjoin her to become the tender, faithful wife of an honourable man who loves her, and would, if she rejected him, suffer the counterpart of her own bitter disappointment."

"This is terrible! Oh, Caroline, how prosaic you have become! What! make the best of a bad bargain! Is that the burden of your teaching?" cried Augusta, mockingly.

"Yes, it is—it is!" answered Caroline, with a faltering voice, all her composure suddenly vanishing; "and it is no laughing matter for one—who—yes, I am a commonplace girl, and I say, life may be a bad bargain, but I'll make the best of it."

As she uttered these simple words, with a pathos which, with her customary unobtrusive fortitude, she tried to conceal, she rose from her seat with a tell-tale brightness in her eyes, and, passing through the French windows, left the hall, to saunter alone on the terrace.

With a womanly and graceful readiness to amuse a guest, Augusta Wingfield took me over her mansion, and showed me all its treasures. And I walked by her side, listening to her, thanking her for her kindness and condescension, amusing her with my wit, and thinking to myself, "So this beautiful and richly-endowed girl is to be the wife of Rawleigh Ufford!"

As my mistress and I drove home in the afternoon—so as to arrive at Laburnum Cottage at dusk—we did not exchange many words.

CHAPTER IV.

A QUESTION OF HONOUR.

WE did not see Augusta Wingfield again during her sojourn at Braden Manor, though she more than once, while performing the part of hostess to us, said she would drive over to Aldeburgh in the course of ten days, and call on us. I felt at the time that she would not keep her word—that she would only care to amuse herself with us for that one day, and that, having gratified herself with displaying

her beautiful house, and faultless taste, and high-minded urbanity to me, she would with all speed and facility dismiss the memory of such an insignificant creature from her mind. I was, therefore, not surprised at her not paying us the promised visit. Neither was I astonished when, at the end of a month, I learnt she had quitted Braden Manor once more, to avoid the fall of the leaf at a fashionable watering-place.

Autumn went on, and winter arrived. The Aldeburgh tradesmen received orders for the accomplishment of certain inferior works in preparation for the ordinary Christmas festivals at Linton. The Earl was expected to receive an unusually brilliant circle of guests. It is no part of my business to chronicle the achievements of the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth, or the honours of his house, but a few brief lines on the family history of the Uffords may be acceptable to my readers, and spare them the trouble of referring to Burke

and De Brett, copies of whose useful and brilliantly-bound works on our hereditary *noblesse* no well-regulated household can get on without.

As the child of a poacher, and an ex-maid-of-all-work, I should like to vent my bitterness on earthly rank and dignity by depicting the Uffords as mushroom upstarts. But justice compels me to state that the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth was as sound and unquestionable a specimen of pure Scandinavian descent as can be found in all the novels of the silver-fork school. He was descended without hitch or flaw of pedigree from Godfrey de Ufford, who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror, and obtained from that successful thief a grant of fifty manors, an illegitimate daughter in wedlock, and the office of hereditary custodian of any waifs, strays, moneys, chattels, tenements, lands, or other hereditaments which he could wrest from any person weaker than himself, and residing within

thirty miles of Dunwich Castle. Godfrey, being a loyal subject as well as a stalwart baron, felt it his duty to carry out to the full his royal master's will and pleasure, as expressed by the permissive clauses of the letters which invested him with the said hereditary custodianship. But the task of doing so was a somewhat difficult one, as there were scattered through his district a vast number of ecclesiastics, petty thanes, and other plebeians, who entertained a mistaken and painfully ridiculous notion that they had certain rights in the soil which they and their fathers had tilled from time immemorial. To overcome these erroneous views, and the scandalous resistance which their entertainers persevered in against the constituted authority of the realm, cost Godfrey de Ufford much toil and tough fighting. But by drawing up a code of laws for the guidance of the officers of his courts—in which the penalties of death or perpetual servitude were awarded to all

disturbers of social order—and by keeping in his pay a gang of mail-clad cut-throats whom he humorously designated “gentlemen” at arms, he reduced the country subject to his jurisdiction to the same state of quiet political freedom and substantial prosperity as France has been endowed with by a military despotism. If Godfrey’s petty subjects did not grow rich, he did (a matter of much more importance in a nation’s history), and in process of time he became so mighty a personage that his wealth and power altogether surpassed those of his Scandinavian ancestor, Thun, the son of Bladud, the son of Han, the son of Hanneth, who, in his capacity of sea-king, spent a quarter of a century in knocking about the coast of Denmark in a clumsy boat with a score of ruffians (who, like their commander, were in a state of perpetual intoxication), and, eventually working his way to Normandy, seized on the estate of some petty chieftain, whose feeble health and extreme sickness made

it evident to Thun, the son of Bladud, that it would be nothing more than common charity to relieve him of the cares of government—and existence.

From Thun, the son of Bladud, down to Godfrey de Ufford, and from Godfrey downwards, the conspicuous members of the family displayed singular boldness and alacrity in looking after their own interests. Of two cadets of the house an old chronicler observed: “And truly they were men to be marvelled at; by turns of a merrie witte and cruel humour, and whenever they hadde a pointe to gaine, bloode was to them the same as water, for they allowed none to stand in their way.” Such was the testimony of an eye-witness to the characters of two Uffords of the seventeenth century, who led a colony over to the American forests, and firmly planted them there. Such was the repute of the Uffords of every age — courageous, clever, and unscrupulous. They were always lucky and victorious, and

most so when they had been especially imprudent and deserving of overthrow. They had reverses, but they always triumphed over them; knowing well, when Fortune frowned, how to win back her smiles by a deed of honour or shame. They forfeited to Henry VII. half their territories for a piece of abortive treason, but Henry VIII. restored them the lost manors, and in addition to them all the abbey-lands which the pious Godfrey de Ufford, aforementioned, presented the Holy Church with on his death-bed. In like manner, at the opening of the Hanoverian dynasty, they got into trouble by staking too heavily and with indiscreet frankness on the cause of the Pretender; but that mattered not, for in the reign of George III. Marmaduke, the twenty-second Baron Ufford, raised himself to the rank and title of Viscount Cheveley, and then to the style and dignity of Earl of Linton-Stetchworth.

How Marmaduke accomplished this, it is

needless to state with conscientious accuracy. The unkind world maintained that the increase of honour came to him through Marguerita, his countess ; but this could hardly be the case, for she had nought but dishonour to bestow on any man, at the time she married him. She had wasted the bloom of her young beauty in charming a royal lover ; and, though she subsequently married a spotless nobleman, who had shot more men than any other duellist of his rank, and had quickly passed through two mutations of name, she did not lose by the process the fame of her early distinctions, nor did he either. Possibly, her frivolous life had been full enough of disappointment to reconcile her to the grave, ere her delicate beauty had altogether departed from her. Anyhow, she died, leaving an infant son and heir to her husband.

This son was Lord Cheveley, whom I had seen riding with Miss Wingfield.

The Earl of Linton-Stetchworth was a

highly-respected peer. He belonged to a good set. His politics were moderate,—Conservative, as befitted his order, and yet tinctured with a little of that Liberalism which was then coming into fashion. His morals and religious principles were not less judicious. In private he pleased his *taste*, which perhaps was not of the purest, but in public he was a model of the devout English patrician—always treating bishops as if he thought them gentlemen, always having one of his chaplains present at his State banquets, always at Christmas asking the Rector of Linton-Stetchworth to dinner, and frequently in the House of Peers making complimentary allusions to, and declarations of faith in, the Providence who guides all human events. But the noble lord was most unctuous when he urged on his younger tenantry the advantages of early and virtuous marriages. There were scandals afloat about the Earl's private life: his habits were said to be infamous. Those who didn't

know him personally averred that ancient Rome never produced in all her hot-beds of patrician vice his equal for self-indulgence ; but then, those who had the honour of his acquaintance never confirmed these rumours ; they only held their tongues, listened, and looked on. Doubtless the unpleasant reports were only the vile fabrications of revolutionary agents, for at Linton, and at Stetchworth House, Mayfair, the best men and most virtuous ladies—the Bishops and Court beauties of the Regency—were in the habit of meeting, which, of course, they would never have done on dubious ground. Certainly Marmaduke Ufford had a villa at Richmond, to which only a select few of his associates had the *entrée* ; but I don't feel inclined to enter that unpretending mansion, nor, I dare say, do my readers.

The Linton revels were on the point of once again celebrating the return of Christmas, and I and my mistress in our

deceitful hearts were looking forward, without interchanging a word on the subject, to the pleasure of seeing Rawleigh Ufford once more, when news reached us that dissipated our agreeable hopes. Mrs. Wingfield, Augusta's mamma, died in London, a few days previous to the time she had fixed on for setting out with her child to the provincial court held at Linton. The poor woman's body was brought down with dawdling pomp to Braden, and placed by the coffin of her husband, who had shot himself twenty years before, and her soul—but I mayn't preach, as I am neither a clerk nor a novel-writer. Augusta remained in town. London is a good place to mourn in; you can be as merry as you like, and yet have no one to observe and reprove you. The balls in the Earl's palace were this year, it was rumoured, to lose the attraction of Miss Wingfield's presence. Domestic affliction prevented the brilliant heiress from appearing on her customary scene of triumph.

This intelligence prepared Miss Ufford and myself for the announcement which speedily followed it, that Rawleigh would not visit his uncle that Christmas. He wrote to his cousin that he was off to Scotland, for the purpose of cultivating certain northern grandees, whose political support he was anxious to obtain. The morning the epistle containing this news arrived, I noticed tears more than once in my mistress's eyes, and she observed the same signs of annoyance in mine; but we neither of us said we were sorry that we should not see our hero again for several months.

The next six weeks of my life were trying ones. It was such fine weather out of doors, and so cloudy within! I played cards and rattled dice, hour after hour, with Mr. Ufford, and I applied to my lessons in French and music with an intensity of application that bordered on ferocity; but I could not drive away the thoughts of yearning and discontent which gnawed at my heart. Every day an

equipage, of greater or less magificence, conveying guests to Linton, dashed through the market-place, making my mistress shiver and turn pale, and then flush, and scattering to the winds all my prudent resolutions to dismiss all heed for the proceedings of lords and ladies from my mind. But my mistress suffered more than I did. Her manner was, perhaps, more cheerful than ever; she smiled more frequently, and her words abounded with an unusual wealth of quaint pleasantries; but she became thin, alarmingly so; twice she fainted away without any assignable cause, and whenever she imagined herself to be unobserved, an expression of deep melancholy settled on her gentle brows. Her miserable old father did not of course discern this; but I did, and the apprehension that I might lose my mistress haunted me in my dreams, as well as when I was awake. At first I felt acute pain and horror at the thought that soon her sweet voice might be silent, and her smooth cheeks

cause me when I touched them to shudder and become cold with horror,—and I cried bitterly in the silence of night, solely, sincerely, and without any alloy of selfish considerations (believe me, when I say so) *for her*, out of my pity and passionate love for her. But soon this state of mind wore away; and I began to think with alarm of myself. What would become of me, if I suddenly found myself once more alone in the world? Should my mistress die within a few months, what would become of me? Then a miserable panic seized me, and every sordid fancy and vile form of selfishness scared me with visions of what might befall me, if I should be suddenly bereft of my benefactress. I could not spare her yet; I could not afford to do without her. I wanted to make more use of her, to get more out of her, to be a better French scholar and musician, to know German and Italian, to be older and in the full strength of womanhood. Otherwise I could not stand by myself.

Strange to say, however, this excitement, like the former, passed away, and I found myself, to my great surprise, quite happy over various plans and schemes for my future progress in life. Should I be a lady's maid? or try to get a situation as a governess? or get my living by singing? Supposing my mistress died, I would live for a few weeks as maid to Mrs. Cookesley, who of course would take me in, and in her house I would soon find an opportunity of introducing myself to a lady, and asking her to take me into her service. Only it must be service in London! Yes, I would get up to London, and see if I could not make my fortune! I knew enough of the world to see that Rawleigh Ufford could *really* help me in no other way than that in which he had already served me,—with money and a recommendation to a situation as lady's maid or under-governess. I would not, therefore, apply to him except in my last extremity. I would be independent, make a career for my-

self, and possibly one day arrive at a position from which even he might deign to take a wife. Yes, I would be independent! And at the delightful word, a yearning for adventure and a thousand intoxicating hopes drove common sense from her ordinary dominion over my mind. It required only three days to convey me from this state into one in which I fretted at the restraints and disadvantages of my position,—its total want of variety, and remoteness from all those accidents which, it was my romance to believe, would bear me to eminence. How could I get free from it? Surely my mistress would not be so unjust, so irrational, so tyrannical, so exacting, as to think that, because she had done me great services (nothing more, though, than I would have done for her, had our places been reversed), I was bound to link myself to her humble fortunes, and to waste all the best part of my existence in a little fishing-town. Still I could not run away from her or desert her. It would pain me

very much to have her think me ungrateful. The consequent sense of shame would embitter all my existence. But how could I get quit of her ? Then it came to my mind that Caroline Ufford had no very bright prospect before her in life ; that her father was dishonoured ; that her kindred looked coldly upon her ; that her heart was fixed on one who would never love her ; and that poverty, at least dependence, was her destiny.

On the other hand, she was ripe for heaven. The earth was not made for such angels as she. Possibly it would be better for her, and me too, if her strength failed her,—and she calmly, with her gentle eyes fixed on the divine image of mercy, went the downward way of death. Yes, I wished she might die.

“What! and has it come to this?” whispered a still small monitor within me. “Heartless, vile, deceitful, detestable child,—would you kill your second mistress.”

I started up with a keen pang of agony,

that seemed as if a giant's hand had gripped my heart and was pulling it forcibly from its seat within me ; and I fell on the floor, by the side of my bed, weeping bitterly.

“Darling child,” said my mistress, coming quickly into the room and raising me in her arms, “what is the matter with you? I heard something fall—and I came instantly. What makes you so miserable? Oh, you are, and have been, very unhappy, and I have not seen it. I have been thinking too much of myself.”

She took me to her embrace, kissing me, and stroking my hair, and cosseting me as if I had been an infant. And I, when I became calmer, sobbed out my confession,—

“My dear—dear—mistress, when I fell down, a horrible thought came over me of what I am, and what I might have been, had it not been for that terrible time, a year, and two years, and three years ago. You know when I mean, and what I mean. Oh, God

pardon me ! The stain of blood will never be washed from me ! ”

But my perturbation quickly passed from me, and in a few weeks its principal cause also disappeared. My mistress became stronger and better, with the opening of the spring. Indeed, as soon as the quiet of Aldeburgh ceased to be disturbed by the carriages of the Linton visitors, a manifest improvement in her health commenced ; and by the setting in of the March winds the pallor had quitted her cheeks, and the feebleness left her nerves.

She had need of all the strength the powers of mercy saw fit to endow her with ; for, when the cold showers of April became frequent, her feelings sustained a new shock—perhaps the most cruel one they had hitherto sustained.

At that time she received three long letters in quick succession, through the post. I knew from whom they came ; the hand-

writing was familiar to me, and pleasant to my eye as the shadows of a pencil-drawing. The first of the three made Caroline Ufford turn white—as much, it seemed to me, with anger as with pain; and the long answer which she made to it, by the returning post, she dashed off on several sheets of paper, her eyes meanwhile burning with an unaccustomed light, and her lips trembling as if they were eager to scold an enemy. The second letter agitated her even more than the first, and after reading it she locked herself for hours in her own room, and when she reappeared, no efforts she could make at assuming an air of composure were able to conceal from me that she had been crying and suffering greatly. To that second letter also she sent an answer, but I did not see her write it.

The third letter I saw her open and peruse—or rather devour.

“What are you looking at me so for?” she cried sharply, with a vehemence of displea-

sure I had never known her exhibit before. "Why do you watch me so, Miriam? Must you pry into every secret I have? How dare you pester me with this impertinence?"

"And how dare you," I retorted fiercely, "receive letters from him after all you told me and I told you, without letting me know what they contain?"

"Miriam—I cannot bear this," she exclaimed, stamping her foot passionately on the floor; "leave the room—this instant—this instant. I will not submit to this from you."

But scarcely were these unkind words spoken when she recovered herself, and, running to me and catching hold of my arm, as I was about to leave the room in obedience to her imperious command, she kissed me, and overwhelmed me with entreaties to pardon her.

"I am mad, darling—mad; my brain is

turning. You must pardon me. Be patient for a few days, and I will tell you all. I must ask and obtain his leave before I impart to you what he tells me in confidence. Remember how I love you, and find in my affection a proof that I do not mean to wrong you."

Without stopping to say more, she hastened from the room, bearing with her the letter which had been the cause of this scene. But in her hurry and agitation she dropped a small piece of paper, that had been slipped by way of a postscript into the enclosure which contained the body of the epistle. Quick as lightning I darted forward, and pounced on this prey. In a twinkling I read every word of the inscription, which ran thus:—

"P.S. Your suggestions were charitable, but unmerited. The treachery is not in the quarter you suspect. Watson has been faithful to me ever since I was a boy, and in this matter most zealous. With proper feeling, while his sus-

pitions were only suspicions, he kept them to his own breast, and did not mar my peace with them. But when he obtained all the proofs that have been detailed to you, of the deceit of which I was the victim, like a devoted servant he communicated them. I have not formed my judgment rashly or intemperately. See, this instant Cheveley's reply to my letter has been brought. He coldly states that '*it is not his intention* to discuss with me the subject treated of in my last communication, as he regards it as a matter concerning no one except himself and the lady who has honoured him beyond all other men.' This is his answer. Now judge for yourself. He is a mean, false villain. But she—oh, she—is—? Good-bye.—Rawleigh Ufford."

I read this rapidly; but every word bit itself into my eye and memory, so that I ever afterwards was able to recall that scrap of paper—its very blots and cancelings, as well as its sentences. As soon as I had possessed

myself of its contents, I ran upstairs, and, knocking at the door of my mistress's room, begged her to unlock it and come out to me. She complied, and I gave into her hands the postscript.

"I did not see it before," she exclaimed.

"You dropt it just now."

"I wish, Miriam, I felt myself permitted to show it, and all the other letters, to you."

"Never mind me. I don't want to see anything. Only love me, my dear mistress, and, if he is in trouble, tell him that the strongest sentiment of my grateful heart is love for him. Do this, Caroline; and I promise not to be irritable with you for guarding his trust as jealously as I would, if he honoured me with it."

I turned away with a kiss from Caroline Ufford's lips on my forehead, and she went back into her room to think—and weep in the fashion of weak women—and write a letter to Rawleigh.

In the afternoon she gave me this epistle, sealed and directed, and begged me to post it for her. I, of course, was ready enough to obey her commands, and started off with alacrity to execute them. The letter-box had been removed to a distant part of the town, and it was half-a-mile's walk to it. Perhaps I lingered on the way, or perhaps the evening closed in more rapidly than usual. Anyhow, dusk overtook me on my return homewards, and so likewise (and much more to my astonishment) did Rawleigh Ufford's servant, Watson. He passed me, on the opposite side of a narrow, dingy little street, without observing me. The high collars of his great-coat were turned up against his sallow cheeks, a woollen muffler was twisted twice round his neck and concealed his huge mouth, and his hat was pulled down over his crafty eyes. Evidently he wanted to escape the observations of any acquaintances he might have in the town, and so shrouded was he by his costume that

there was little chance of anyone less acute than myself recognising him.

He turned down a by-way that led to a timber merchant's yard, and I, standing behind the gate, saw him pace up and down the cart-way, as if bent on getting rid of the time. He was clearly waiting for some one,—most probably for his master. In the hope that I might by lingering get a glimpse of Rawleigh Ufford, I loitered in the street for a quarter of an hour, keeping my eye fixed on the gate of the timber yard, so that Watson should not emerge from it without my knowledge. It became darker, then quite dark. There was no longer any fear to me of detection in the street, for Aldeburgh had no public lamps. Soon the boy from the post-office ran past with the letter-bag to be put in the mail when it stopped at the "George Inn," and soon afterwards the mail itself clattered down the street, and as I strained my eyes after it, Watson strode past me once more. This time, however, he was on the same

side of the street, and the tails of his long overcoat swept against the skirt of my dress.

We arrived by the side of the mail at the same time, just as the reeking horses were being led away. A man, who had occupied the box-seat next the coachman, descended, and, after peering into several faces in the crowd, approached us, as we were standing on the outskirts of the gathering. The new comer was concealed by an enormous white coat, with absurdly large capes; and for an instant I hoped and fancied it was Mr. Ufford. But I was soon undeceived.

“Here I am, sir,” said Watson, approaching the stranger, but taking care to keep beyond the glare of the lamps, which blazed upon the mail,—“here I am, sir.”

“Oh, all right—wait an instant, I am very cold, and must get a glass of brandy-and-wate in ‘The George.’”

(The voice was an unmistakable one; it belonged to Mr. Millicent.)

“Pray, don’t sir,—you’ll be known, and everything will blow.”

“Umph ! Perhaps you are right.”

“There’s a horse and carriage waiting for us just out of the town. We had better get to Blyburgh, and sleep there for a few hours. We sha’n’t have a long night’s rest. The Blyburgh ‘Horse Shoe’ is quiet and handy—not more than two miles from Braden.”

“Very good. Then you have arranged everything?”

“Everything, sir.”

“What a terrible queer fancy this is about the spot ! He swears he’ll shoot the rascal dead in the park, within sight of the Manor House.”

“How did he get the choice of ground ? I thought his Lordship would have that.”

“Don’t you know ?”

“No, Mr. Millicent. My master wrote quite short to me, only saying that such a thing would come off, and where.”

“ Oh, why, he forced the challenge out of the fellow. He found him at Crocky’s, and luckily in the very act of throwing some coggled dice ; so he sprang up at him, and struck him in the face, calling him a sharper.”

“ And then ? ”

“ You know all that I do, my good Watson. The affair is to come off ; and if it end as I wish it, it’ll be a good thing for you.”

“ And, for the matter of that, for you too, sir. You’ll be the friend, one day, of an English baron, instead of an earl’s nephew.”

“ Ha ! ha ! And you, Watson, will be his lordship’s faithful and confidential retainer.”

“ By ——, though, if I will ! ”

As Watson uttered these last words, he clenched his fist, and made a gesticulation of impatience, implying that it was unwise in his superior to stand gossiping at a street corner. The hint was taken, and Mr. Millicent, moving on, said, “ Keep abreast of me ; we can be friends, at least for to-night ; ” and, without sus-

pecting they had been watched and overheard, the two men—the gentleman and the servant—proceeded onwards in the direction of the Blyburgh road.

I had heard enough : it was clear to me that a hostile meeting would take place by dawn next day in the park of Braden Manor, between Rawleigh Ufford and Lord Cheveley. I was not surprised to learn that such a catastrophe was the consequence of the latter's treacherous conduct to his cousin ; for the knowledge of life which I had acquired through novels, during the previous eighteen months, and my conversations before alluded to with old Mr. Ufford on the laws of honour and duelling, had familiarized me with the idea of enraged men seeking the delights of vengeance in deeds of violence and danger. But it had not before occurred to me that there was an imminent risk of an encounter between the two cousins and rivals. At first the discovery almost upset my prudence. For an instant my impulse was to run home,

and communicate all I had heard to my mistress ; but a very brief period of reflection enabled me to see the disadvantages of this step. Miss Ufford would immediately communicate the intelligence to others who would have the power and inclination to prevent the appointed conflict, and then, Rawleigh Ufford, furious at being balked of his revenge, would never forgive his cousin for her officious meddling, or me for having spied into and blabbed about his proceedings. So I must be my own counsellor, and act for myself. In addition to the prudential considerations which led me to adopt this resolution, I was, it must be confessed, influenced by a subtle sense of satisfaction at punishing my mistress's reticence about her cousin's letters by not admitting her to a participation of my secrets.

I took my way home as soon as I had seen Watson and Mr. Millicent walk off to the carriage that awaited them on the Blyburgh road ; and, having made some ingenious ex-

cuse for the length of time I had been absent, I took my tea in the company of Miss Ufford and her father. I was very taciturn all the evening, sitting with one of Voltaire's plays before me, and feigning to be totally absorbed in its dramatic excellences. Mr. Ufford, as usual, went out to "The George" billiard-room; and Miss Ufford, engrossed with her own thoughts, did not care to break in on my studious abstraction. When the clock struck ten I put up my book, and went off to bed. Shortly after this, Mr. Ufford returned with unusual sobriety from his club, and straightway retired to rest. Miss Ufford, having barred the outer door, speedily did the same; and, by midnight, everyone in the house, with the exception of myself, was asleep.

I too dozed off; and had a short, painful dream. It seemed to me that I stood in Braden Park, near the water-lock, just where my mistress had made her sketch, and that I saw two men, Rawleigh Ufford and Lord Cheveley

stand up, face to face, pale but unflinching, and, having deliberately taken aim, fire at each other with pistols,—both at the same instant.

It was enough; I dreamed no more. Quickly rising from my bed, I dressed myself in my walking costume and crept downstairs. The entrance door was not locked: it was only barred. Without making a pin-fall of noise, I slipped the bolts and walked out into the cold night air. I remembered the road to Braden, and took it. Everything around me was silent, as I proceeded on my way. There was no wind stirring, no noise of men, not even the barking of a distant house-dog. With a sense of scared astonishment at my own boldness I walked on, marking and looking out for gates, and styles, and turnings, and farmsheds that might reassure me I had not deviated from the right route. Memories flitted across me of other night-walks I had taken. I recalled the night when I had followed my father and Joel Haggart's cart to Melton, and the

fray I had witnessed there ; and all the particulars of my flight from Daniel Muscut's house, till terror robbed me of consciousness, rose vividly before me.

Without difficulty or interruption I arrived at the outskirts of Braden Manor, and then, making the park-paling my guide, I hastened on to the lock-gate. When the rattling of the water, as it streamed over the bar, and plashed into the bed below, reached my ear, a cold grey streak of dawn crept up the dull sky from the horizon. No time was to be lost. I climbed the high palings which fenced the park, tearing my skirts sadly in the operation, and then, after resting my body for half a minute on the ridge of ragged timber, I let myself down as far as the length of my arms would permit. Lastly, I relinquished my hold of the top, and dropped about four feet down, into the park below. The whole feat was performed with a courage and agility that a schoolboy would have admired.

I was now on the very spot where I dreamt the duel would be fought. And my dream did not deceive me. I squatted down behind a gnarled trunk and a mass of quickset fence, and in a few minutes I heard feet approaching. Two gentlemen crossed over the lock-bridge, and, descending into the dell, stood and conversed at a distance of about twenty yards from me.

One was a tall, handsome man with a black moustache, about forty years of age, and of a military aspect. The other was Lord Cheveley. I knew him instantly by his slight frame and pinched chest; by his pale face, of which subtleness and cunning were the dominant expressions; by his brown hair and large flaxen whiskers, as lank as they were abundant; by his hatchet nose, hare-lips, and want of eyelashes. He was dressed in a tightly-fitting suit of black, and altogether he looked so small and mean that, when he stood sideways to me, he had not more size or presence than a gate-post.

“What an infernal ditch to be shot in!” observed Lord Cheveley’s friend.

“Yes, Archy; but ’tis his choice. Surely a man has a right to select what spot he’ll be killed on.”

“Surely;—but what a row there’ll be! What wont the pious people say to you for shooting your first cousin?”

“And of him for trying to shoot me—and so get the Barony and the estates! What a d——d nuisance it is that I can’t get my father to join with me and cut off the entail! I hate the fellow from my soul; and yet, if he escape me to-day, his children may, a generation hence, have Linton. Gad! if it wouldn’t make a noise, I’d send a ball at that old water-hen.”

Lord Cheveley was a good actor, but I saw under his affectation of lightness and gaiety a feverish excitement of terror.

“Don’t smoke any more,” interposed Archy, seeing that his “man” was proceeding to

light a fresh cigar by the one he had just completed the destruction of; "your hand wont be steady."

"Bah!—no fear about that."

"The affair will depend very much on the toss."

"Which I am certain to get. I never in my life lost a toss."

A pause.

"Will you shoot him dead if you get the chance?" Archy resumed by asking, twirling his moustache as he put the question.

"Certainly. How can you ask me?"

"To avoid scandal, don't you think it would be better if you only winged him?"

"Pooh!—thank God! peers and their eldest sons may do anything in this country. We are a Protestant people."

"Gad, Cheveley, I will say this for you; you behave uncommonly well."

"Wait till it's all over before you praise me, I wish they would come; 'tis cold waiting here."

“Here they are.”

At these words Rawleigh Ufford and Charles Millicent crossed over the bridge.

“How d’ye do, Millicent?” said Lord Cheveley, extending his hand to the person he addressed. “Deuced long time since I have seen you. But all the same—’normous pleasure! Allow me to introduce you to my friend Colonel Archibald. (Colonel Archibald, Mr. Millicent; Mr. Millicent, Colonel Archibald.) Archy, my dear boy, stick us up.”

While Lord Cheveley was thus flippantly performing the ceremony of introducing the two seconds to each other, who, singularly enough, had never met before, Rawleigh Ufford stood with a look of simple, unaggressive amusement on his handsome face, which informed me that he took his opponent’s pert imitation of nonchalance at its right worth.

Mr. Millicent and Colonel Archibald exchanged a few sentences together, standing

about twelve paces apart from their principals. Then they separated, and Colonel Archibald said :—

“Gentlemen, as despatch is of importance, and we know it would be useless to attempt to bring about any amicable settlement of your differences, Mr. Millicent and I are of opinion that we had better proceed instantly to business. Ten paces, and toss for the first shot.”

Lord Cheveley took up a position assigned him by his second, and Rawleigh Ufford—his face suddenly flushing with a colour that contrasted strongly with his opponent’s ashy paleness—was placed by Mr. Millicent. Then the seconds measured the ground, by making ten strides over it, and, finding they had hit by sight on the right distance to an inch, congratulated each other on their correctness. They exchanged another sentence or so, after which Colonel Archibald tossed up a guinea in the air.

“Head!” cried Mr. Millicent an instant before the coin returned to Colonel Archibald’s hand.

“You’re wrong,” said the latter; “Britannia favours me.”

Then Mr. Millicent took a guinea from his pocket, and with a dexterous twist made it twirl over and over again in the light of the grey morning.

“The goddess again!” cried Colonel Archibald.

“You’ve the toss,—luck is with you,” replied Mr. Millicent.

Both the principals stood motionless and mute whilst this important point was being decided. But as soon as the result of the tossing was arrived at, a gleam of devilish triumph lighted Lord Cheveley’s wan visage, and he said in an under-tone of exultation to his friend,

“I told you so; the toss is always mine. Now, I’ll—”

“Silence, my lord; behave like a—” sharply responded Colonel Archibald, but I could not

catch the concluding word of the sentence.

At that moment I glided out from my lurking place, and, throwing myself at the feet of Rawleigh Ufford, implored him to speak to me for a few seconds.

"Gad!—'tis his guardian angel, or some poor curate's daughter he has ruined," I heard Lord Cheveley sneer.

Colonel Archibald whistled.

Mr. Millicent hummed a tune.

"Gentlemen!" observed Rawleigh Ufford, bowing and raising his hat, "have the goodness to excuse this interruption, but allow me to speak for a minute with this young lady. She is too sensible a girl, and too much devoted to my interest, to embarrass our proceedings, even if you should see right to deny me this grace."

"Pray, have your interview with the young lady," responded Colonel Archibald. "Lord Cheveley will not object to wait."

Then Rawleigh Ufford took me gently by

the hand, and having led me aside, said in his most bewitchingly tender tones, "My dear girl, what has brought you here? Does any one but yourself know of our meeting?"

"No one, sir, that I am aware of," was my answer,—“and I learnt it in a dream.”

“Be a woman, and my true friend. My honour requires me to fight that man. You would not have the world speak of me with contempt.”

“Indeed, I would not, sir. And, though I knew to a certainty you would be here, I told my secret to no one, but came here on foot alone, so that there might be none to hinder your doing that which is your pleasure.”

“What would you have me to do, Miriam?”

“Promise me not to shoot that man. If you get a shot at him, do not kill him. I implore you, do not.”

“And why does my charming girl want me to promise this?”

“Because, sir,” I answered solemnly, “I

love you, and I know what the curse of blood on one's soul must be. You know what I tried to do — what I did. Oh, sir, the memory of such a deed undoes a human heart—utterly ruins it. No good can live in it afterwards. Then, now, at this last moment, while there is yet time, give up your deadly purpose, and do not try to kill him.”

He was silent for a few seconds, and then he replied softly :—

“Miriam, you would not be here if God had not sent you. Although you are so like her, you may be—you are—I am sure you are—my good angel. I grant you your request. Now wait quietly here till it is all over.”

He quitted me, and returned to his place. I saw him take a pistol from Mr. Millicent's right hand, and then, having drawn himself up to his full height, look Lord Cheveley full in the face. I saw Lord Cheveley accept his pistol from Colonel Archibald, and take a de-

liberate aim at his antagonist's heart. I heard Colonel Archibald say :—

“ Now, gentlemen. One—two—three ! ”

As Colonel Archibald uttered “ three,” Lord Cheveley fired. Rawleigh Ufford staggered, and twisted round, but he did not fall. Surely he was wounded. No,—for he walked steadily over the ten paces that intervened between himself and his cousin, and standing over him, said with withering bitterness :—

“ Nay, poor trembling coward, I will not kill you. I will not send you to another hell. There is no worse one than this world ; it is a fit place for such as you, and yon poor chattering bird shall no longer mock it with its innocent song.”

As he spoke, he twirled the pistol over his head, and fired it off. In another second a small field-bird tumbled from its perch on an elm-bough (on which it had just before lighted) and lay dead at the feet of the sure marksman.

I saw that all was over, and ran up to Rawleigh Ufford to ascertain if he had been wounded, when, to my astonishment, Lord Cheveley sank down in a state of unconsciousness. Fear had asserted its dominion over his mean nature. As long as he had the chance of getting the first shot to rely on, he was able to keep up his spirits, and even to make pretence of light-heartedness. When that chance turned out in his favour, he broke into unmannerly exultation ; but when he had failed to kill his adversary, and instant death seemed impending, craven terror overpowered him, and he fainted away like a woman.

Watson and another man (Colonel Archibald's servant) appeared now upon the ground. The latter deluged Lord Cheveley with water. The former went to the assistance of his master, who was now found to have received Lord Cheveley's ball in his shoulder.

"You're losing blood fast," said Mr. Millicent to him.

“Ay,—give me some brandy, then, in its place.”

“Dear, dear Mr. Ufford,” I cried, “let me help you.”

“And so you shall, Miriam, my charming witch, but it may not be as my nurse. Make all speed to Aldeburgh, and *in strict* confidence tell Caroline all that has happened, so that she may not be made wretched by any ridiculous report which may chance to get afloat. Only make light of the little scratch I have received. And, Miriam, God bless you, my peerless beauty!—you wont see me again for some while. But I sha’n’t forget you; and years hence, when I am a much better or a much worse man, I will thank you for what you have done to-day.”

I kissed his hand over and over again, till Mr. Millicent drew me away, and Watson led his master in the direction of a carriage which was waiting in the road by the side of the park.

“Yes—yes, take me away,” were the last words I heard him say to his servant. “I mayn’t follow the example of—of—Lord Cheveley.”

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF RESIDENCE.

WHEN I returned to Aldeburgh, I related to my mistress all the circumstances of the duel, and she, having for days feared that such an event would take place, with a more painful result than a slight wound to her best-loved cousin, was, on the whole, not ill-pleased with what had happened. With my part in the affair she was especially gratified, and she assured me over and over again that I had been the preserver of her happiness. Heaven

knows she had not much happiness to preserve!

Of course the rumour of the hostile meeting between the only son of the Lord-Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of the county and his near kinsman, the youthful and distinguished parliamentary debater, ran the county and kingdom through, performing the most astounding antics. First the rural, and then the metropolitan organs of what we are pleased to term "free discussion," were very free with their remarks on the subject. The county papers, acting on a fine traditionary law, that it was a sin against art, and also an act of immeasurable audacity, to print the name of an eminent person openly and without an affectation of mystery, alluded in an enigmatical and even darkly terrible manner to "a certain occurrence in which prominent parts had been taken by a certain n—ble—n, the only son of a certain E—l, who should be nameless, and Mr. R—— U——d, the well-

known p—l—t—n, which would have led to a fatal catastrophe, and would have carried devastation to the blighted hearth of a certain L—d-L—t—t of a county not to be mentioned, who resided not more than a hundred miles from L—n, the seat of the Earl of L—n—n St—w—th."

On the whole, this was a desirable form in which to take the news when you were thoroughly acquainted with it before-hand; for it gave the stale intelligence all the excitement and racy flavour of high treason, and made the reader think himself a clever fellow, and well versed in secret literature, since he knew the full signification of "R—— U——d" and "p—l—t—n," &c., &c.

The London journals had, however, outgrown all antiquated caution, and they not only published every particular of the news, but preached about it in a most edifying style, and persuaded themselves and their readers that, in gratifying pure love of gossip, they

were performing an important public service.

Rawleigh Ufford got out of the way of the hubbub by throwing up his seat in the House of Commons and going abroad. His wound, which was, luckily, only a flesh one, speedily healed; and ere it was perfectly restored to a sound condition he had started for the south of Europe. At Paris he was caught up by a note from a fashionable novelist, asking permission to incorporate the particulars of his exciting love-passage in a forthcoming romance, which would be entitled "The Talisman of Park Lane," and aim at the exposure of the incredible vulgarity of Bloomsbury. To this petition Rawleigh responded, with evasive significance, that "he should be sorry to return just then to London to horsewhip anyone." And by the same post he wrote a letter to his cousin Caroline, which concluded thus,—
"Perhaps it is well that my boyish illusions

have been dispelled, but they afforded me so much pleasure that I regret their disappearance. Still, I was too old for such fancies. Nigh thirty—and to believe in honour, purity of taste, noble aspiration! Pah! It makes me blush to think what a fool I have been! You wont hear from me often, Carry,—indeed, to be candid with you, never again—for some years. I mean to break off all weak associations. May happiness (I mean by that ‘good luck’) be yours! One day your life will be brighter than it is at present. Love to Miriam. And, for yourself, as a slip of parting advice, marry, my darling, as soon as you can find a good—settlement.—Your affectionate cousin, Rawleigh.”

“He never wrote to me in that sneering, flippant, unworthy manner before,” cried Caroline, throwing the letter on the table as she finished reading it to me, and allowing her anger and mortification to be apparent in her moist eyes,—“he was never heartless

and bitter and mean before. Oh! he has been made sour and unloving; his faith in womanly goodness has been broken down and dissipated by that woman,—that bad—bad woman.”

“And better that it should be so,” I answered. “Better far that he should be altered, and marred, and tainted with the vileness of those around him. So,—he will be better able to enjoy the world. Since he was not killed in the duel, surely you would rather have him blessed with every chance of being happy here.”

My mistress did not reply to this mad speech in any way, save begging me to pray to God to protect *him*—that Rawleigh Ufford whom she so dearly loved!—from all the dangers that beset him, to revive within him his ancient generosity, and to restore him to that fervour and grand simplicity of life which had characterized his youth and first manhood. She said this with much earnestness of style,

—much quaint pathos of diction, and many gestures of powerful and dramatic womanly grace. I enjoyed looking at her and listening, and could have relished watching her for an entire hour ; but when she quitted the room (as she did, suddenly) and closed the door between me and her troubled beauty, I became indignant with her for presuming to take under her protection—*her interceding care, forsooth !*—the soul of the man I loved ! She should have gloried in his errors, and made them her own ! She professed to be united to him in affection. Then she ought to have defended his failings, even as her egotism would have found excuses for her own deficiencies. He was degraded !—Good ! then she ought, in gladness and pride, to have sunk with him !

For another year I remained at Aldeburgh, leading the same life of monotony in external affairs, and change in all that related to within. I was gratified in my

ambition to acquire a slight knowledge of German and Italian; and I devoured in rapid succession the English poets. I idolized Byron, and for Wordsworth I cherished a contempt and angry aversion that almost bordered on positive disgust. I never allowed myself to betray this dislike to Caroline, who had raised the author of "The Excursion" to the dignity of being one of her chief mental guides. On the contrary, I often read to her, with strong expressions of rapture, the mild lyrics and icy sonnets in which she delighted; and candour compels me to state that more than once, on these occasions of hypocrisy, my mind was seized with returns of the old feeling of how insufferable it would be to be chained down for a continuance at Aldeburgh with my gentle mistress.

But I had no reason for impatience. Circumstances released me from my bondage before it became really tedious to me.

At the close of the April following that in which the duel occurred, old Mr. Ufford sickened. At the opening of May he died. I was heartily glad he did; my mistress said she was sorry. It was the dawn of a peerless mid-day, when she, poor girl, entered my room (having come from the apartment where her father had just expired), and, sinking on my bed, put her head close by mine on the pillow, and whispered, with a terrible firmness of countenance, "All over!—all over!" and then, suddenly dropping into softness, lay beside me, weeping silently, but most pitifully. She remained on that couch all the day, at first in a stupefaction of sorrow, and then in a tranquil slumber, produced by mental and bodily exhaustion. Her humble friend, Mrs. Cookesley, was in the house, taking on herself all the most painful offices that the trouble of the moment required should be discharged. In the afternoon, that good woman aroused my mistress

to consciousness, and then briefly observed :—

“ Yes, dear Miss Caroline, you must go yourself.”

“ Where ? ”

“ To my lady. Indeed, you must, Miss Caroline. Her noble heart will melt to you now. I know it will. And it isn't only that she will be reconciled to *you*, but to *him* also ; and will let you do that which I ween you'd much like to do—to lay him at rest amongst the noble ones he sprang from.”

“ Dear, dear, good woman for thinking of it ! ” cried Caroline, rising up suddenly with new life. “ Surely, it is the last service I can render him. Let me hasten to perform it.”

“ I have ordered down the best chaise and horses from ‘ The George,’ my dear Miss Caroline, and they're this moment at the door. My advice is that you take something to refresh you, and then go off instantly.

You'll of course like to take Miss Copley with you for a companion?—and I'll remain here in charge."

Mrs. Cookesley's considerate and womanly plan was immediately adopted; and in less than half an hour I was boxed up in the best chaise of "The George" with my mistress on our way to Linton, to supplicate the old Dowager Baroness of Clopton to notify to the Earl her wish that his dishonoured brother should, in his death, be pardoned, and receive interment amongst the luckier and more illustrious of his house. My poor mistress did not open her lips to speak during the whole of our journey. Silently pondering on the solemn things of existence, she rested against me, almost lying in my arms; whilst I, in a sufficiently pleasant frame of mind, toyed with a thousand flattering fancies, and built an equal number of graceful castles in the air. A sense of adventure raised my spirits to a pitch almost of exhilaration.

There was a spice of romance in my mistress's errand that made my critical self, that sat within my breast artistically passing judgment on the outer world, regard my outer self—the companion of a dutiful and noble and high-bred girl—as an object of no ordinary poetic beauty; and I became on remarkably good terms with Miriam Copley. Possibly, too, the notion seized me, something good would turn up for me at Linton. Why should not one of the Earl's friends chance to be there, see me, fall in love with me, and marry me? A handsome amount of money would reconcile me to such a self-sacrifice!

It was dusk when we reached Linton; but still there was light enough for me to be grandly impressed by the magnitude of the park, the boldness of its undulations of hill-range, wealth of avenues, and sweeps of stupendous timber. But the setting by no means concealed the gem. High above the brown tops of the forest trees, placed on an

eminence from which it commanded a view of the ocean, twelve miles off, and three counties, was the palace—sending out from its imposing body marble colonnades right and left, that accorded well with the rest of the Italian architecture. Truly, “a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” Such was Linton! the principal residence of the Uffords! the home of the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth!

A patrician sentiment made my veins tingle. The rumble of the post-chaise on the smooth carriage-drive was a martial music to my ears. I would have a carriage of my own one of these days!

The coachman had been directed to drive into the principal court of the palace by a postern-gate, and to draw up at the inferior entrance, by which servants, retainers, and business people were expected to find their way to the kitchens and house-steward's office. Thus, like an humble toiler, creeping in quietly, did my dear mistress return to the princely

home from which a sense of duty on her part, and a sense of shame on the part of her proud relations, had for years excluded her. As she and I glided down a succession of corridors, pervaded by a smell of cooking and a hum of gossiping servants, we encountered several stray lacqueys, who honoured us with side-long glances of curiosity and insolent astonishment. They chanced to be the servants of visitors staying at Linton, and had never seen—most probably had never heard of—Caroline Ufford.

Turning suddenly into a lobby that opened upon a cold, white corridor, Caroline caught hold of my hand, and, having paused for half a minute before a door, tapped lightly at it, and then opened it without waiting for an answer.

“Good gracious!—it is—it is Miss Caroline!” exclaimed a prim, orderly lady, dressed in a brown silk dress, and bearing in her honest countenance and trim attire, of quaker-

like neatness, certain signs which enabled me to guess correctly that she was the old and faithful servant whom Caroline had often told me her grandmamma was most influenced by.

“Mrs. Hendon! I want to see grandmamma,” observed my mistress curtly.

“Anyhow, you must wait, Miss Caroline,” answered Mrs. Hendon, in a friendly voice. “My lady is dining to-day with the family. It is a large and extra-grand party. But, Miss Caroline, if you would honour me by sitting down in my chair here by the fire, and allow me to bring you a cup of coffee, I should be pleased,—and the time would pass quicker to you.”

As she concluded this speech, Mrs. Hendon turned an inquisitive grey eye on me, and then, looking again to her principal visitor, said by an expressive glance:—

“I think you had better let me know who your friend is?”

“This is my constant friend and companion,” observed Caroline, pointing to me.

“Ah!” cried Mrs. Hendon, “Miriam Copley!”

“How did you learn her name?”

“Oh, you may not be surprised, Miss Caroline. My lady, though she has taken no notice of you, has always kept herself informed of your proceedings. Miss Copley certainly is a beautiful young lady, and as much like Miss Wingfield as they said—indeed as two sisters could be! But my lady was not pleased when you took so strongly to her, and made a friend of your servant.”

Possibly I looked angry at Mrs. Hendon’s frankness, but there was no good to be gained by speaking irritably,—so I held my tongue.

“May I inquire after your papa’s health, Miss Caroline?” then resumed Mrs. Hendon, smoothing her white hair, and arranging her cap-strings, and turning once more respectfully to my mistress:—

“How is Mr. Algernon?”

“He is dead,” said Caroline softly.

“What!” exclaimed Mrs. Hendon with astonishment, “Mr. Algernon no more!”

“He died at an early hour this morning.”

Without another word, Mrs. Hendon hastened from her room. In five minutes she returned, bearing in her hands a cup of superlative coffee and a glass of Cognac, and as she put them on a little table by the side of Caroline, she said with genuine emotion:—

“My dear young lady, I am truly sorry for you. Had I known what grief you were in, I would never have pestered you with my impertinent questions. Sit here, Miss Caroline, with Miss Copley to keep you company. I won't worry you with my presence. And, miss, make sure that you shall see my lady ere long, for I'll make her see you, even if I lose her favour by it.”

There was a tear in Mrs. Hendon's intelligent eyes as she left the room, and I felt a

gush of tenderness for the good soul. "She is a womanly creature!" said I. But a moment after, another view of the case struck me, and my internal ejaculation was—"Pah! she is gone to the housekeeper's room to enjoy a gossip, and the importance of being the first to communicate to the upper servants an exciting piece of news."

Whichever was the right interpretation of Mrs. Hendon's conduct, she did not return to us till after the expiration of nearly two hours, when she announced to my mistress that her lady would receive her, and that I might accompany her into the Dowager's presence. Caroline, in her gratitude to Mrs. Hendon for her mediatory exertions, approached that worthy person and kissed her, calling her "dear Mrs. Hendon." "Umph," thought I, "I didn't know her kisses were so cheap. She has not honoured me so greatly, after all."

Mrs. Hendon conducted us through a

labyrinth of passages, then up some stairs, and then along more passages, when we entered an elegant ante-chamber, lighted, and with a brisk fire in its stove.

“You can go straight in, Miss ;—are you ready ? ” asked our conductress.

“Yes,” replied my mistress, catching her breath spasmodically.

Mrs. Hendon forthwith opened a door, and my mistress and I entered another room ; but before we could see its size or contents we had to walk round a high screen, arranged so as to protect the room from the entrance of currents of cold air.

When we had worked our way round this high fence of Japan work, we found ourselves in a lofty apartment, luxuriously furnished with couches and lounges of every description, carpeted like a moss-bank, and supplied with an excess of ornamental upholstery, cases of richly-bound books, pictures, cabinets of bijouterie, vases of gold fish, mirrors, and

statuettes. A lamp hung from the ceiling's gilded fret-work, and afforded through a tinted glass a soft but ample light. In a capacious lounge-chair, before a blazing fire which she prevented scorching her face by a curiously-wrought fan, with her feet buried in a bunch of Eider down, and her still handsome face in a setting of white hair and point-lace, was the Dowager Lady Ufford. She was really ninety-two years of age; but I should not have supposed her to be more than seventy.

"Well, Caroline," observed this ancient dame, turning slowly towards us,—so that her face, which we first saw in its aquiline profile, was gradually brought full before us with all the width of its remarkable comeliness.

"Hendon tells me you wished to speak to me. Don't be frightened, child; I have no quarrel with *you*. I am rather pleased than not to see you. And who is that with you?"

“My friend, dear grandmammina—Miriam Copley.”

“Your servant—ah, to be sure! Well, and has she turned out well? The steward tells me her father was a poacher and killed a keeper. But that is no reason why the young woman should not be a very respectable young person. And if not, why, I suppose Aldeburgh has got stocks and a whipping-post.”

As she said this, the imperious old woman looked at me with a kindly smile, and then, raising her hand, over which a lace ruffle fell, pointed to the screen. Cowed, enraged, and crimson with shame, I fell back like a slave before her keen glance, and stood on the door-mat behind the screen.

“You should keep the girl in better order,” resumed the lady in her rich, deep voice, which sounded more like a young man’s than a very old woman’s; “you should not dress her so well, either. Her clothes are common

enough, of course, but she looks like a poor gentleman's daughter. She is well-looking, but saucy. It's a pity some one does not send her to the theatres. She is too pretty for a maid-servant or a governess."

I was glad Caroline did not resent this contumelious treatment of me further than by saying, "I have not seen you for years, grand-mamma, and during the last two or three of them I have had scarce a friend but Miriam."

"What did you want to say to me, child?" asked the Dowager abruptly.

"I wanted to speak of papa."

"Well—more forgeries? What is it? His butcher's name this time?—eh?—speak out."

"He is dead!"

There was a pause of at least three minutes (to me it seemed three hours) after this announcement, and when it was broken, I heard the silvery tones of Caroline Ufford's voice beseeching for an honourable interment of her father's body.

“ Dear grandmamma, do not think of him as he has been during these last sad years of suffering and disgrace. They are over now ; as, ere long, our last days will be also. If he sinned, surely he has been punished sufficiently. Let us spare his memory, for its honour or dishonour must be ours as well as his. Look back to the time when you were a young girl and married Rupert, the last friend of the last of the Stuarts. Then, remember your children—how they came upon you, one after another, in all their beauty and loveliness, their chivalric promise and high presence—the Earl,—then cousin Rawleigh’s father, who died the same day Nelson died—and lastly, Algernon—the boy to whom the King said, ‘ Little fellow, thank God for your mother’s noble race, and thank her for giving you so much beauty.’ Oh, grandmamma, all that remains of that child’s rounded limbs, and proud brow, and laughing lips, is an old man’s scarred and beaten corpse. Let the silent clay lie near

his father's,—near the coffin of Lord Rupert, who was the Chevalier's—*the King's* friend.”

There was another pause, and when it was terminated, the aged mother replied in a broken voice:—

“Caroline, I have seemed a stern old woman to you. But the day was when my heart was as tender and my tongue as truthful as my face was fair and my figure lithe. And know you this, girl: from the bottom of my soul I love you and honour you. You've done to your father as, when I was of your age, I would have done to mine, had he needed such service. Your father was my son; and you are the image of my husband, as far as a feeble girl can resemble a royal man. The Earl shall mourn for his brother, and stand sorrowfully at your father's grave; and he shall render honour to you, as I do, for having triumphed, whilst all the rest of us were cowards.”

“Dear grandmamma—dear, dear grand-

mamma," broke forth Caroline, falling on her knees and kissing the Dowager's hand, "then let me go back to him—let me go back to him now. I will wait by him and watch him yet a few days more—and return with him when he returns—to his old home again."

And thus it was that Caroline gained her petition and completed her long years of filial slavery. When the imperious mother declared her will, the prudent Earl, her son (who had never ceased blaming, in his own mind, the folly of his father, in leaving Ann, his Baroness, in uncontrolled possession of a considerable estate), relented to his brother's memory, and a sumptuous funeral was bestowed on the dead body. There were waving plumes, and a long train of mourning carriages, drawn by black horses—with unmistakable dabs of lamp-black about their legs, and with those long tails which none but undertakers' horses have; and in the rear of this verbal-contract masquerade of feudal

pomp came the coaches of the county families, and an endless string of the Earl's tenantry. If the obsequies had been those of the Lord-Lieutenant himself, instead of his ne'er-do-weel brother, they could not have been more costly, imposing, or ridiculous. But this was a full generation since, when Englishmen liked to be buried handsomely, though they did not often trouble themselves to live so.

No one may laugh at my poor mistress, when I say that in all this empty mummery she found unspeakable satisfaction. She saw in it the reversal of Society's sentence of outlawry against her sire ; and perhaps she construed it aright, and only erred in rating too high the importance of society's sentences and reversals. Anyhow, she was gratified ; and I judged from her countenance that her pious exultation reached its height when the county papers notified by black marginal columns, an eighth of an

inch wide, the deep grief of the county at the death “ of the Honourable Algernon Ufford, third and youngest son of Rupert, twentieth Baron Ufford, by Ann, only child and heiress of the late Marquis of Stonehenge, and brother of the Lord Lieutenant of the County, the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth. The deceased resided for upwards of five-and-twenty years at Ronan Court, in this county, during which time he was Master of the Border Fox Hounds, and distinguished himself in that capacity by his truly sportsmanlike urbanity. He was well known on the Turf, having for some years maintained a splendid stud at Newmarket. In the fashionable circles of the metropolis also he was for a long period a personage of note, being one of the original founders of the ‘Olympus Four-in-Hand.’ He represented Aldeburgh in Parliament for five sessions, and was, moreover, a Deputy-Lieutenant and Magistrate for this and the two adjoining counties. Acute bodily suffering

and infirmity had for several years prevented Mr. Algernon Ufford from mixing in the circles he was so eminently calculated to adorn ; but he bore the excruciating agonies to which it had pleased Heaven to subject him with the heroic fortitude of his race. As a good landlord, a tender father, and a true friend to the poor, the Honourable Algernon Ufford will be long remembered. ‘Take him for all in all, we ne’er shall see his like again.’”

Laburnum Cottage quickly passed to new occupants, and Caroline Ufford returned to the protection of her grandmamma. The Earl, who, according to his custom, had come from town only for a three weeks’ visit to Linton, on the day of the funeral went up again to London, so as to discharge his duties at Westminster and Richmond. The Dowager Lady Ufford resolved on prolonging her sojourn at Linton (she rarely visited Mayfair now), and Caroline, of course, was enrolled as a member of her family.

“And, my dear,” said the old lady drily, turning her keen eyes from Caroline to me, on the occasion of our being summoned into her presence for “a few little explanations,” “if you would like to retain Miriam Copley in your service, well and good! do so—but it must be as your maid. We must have no nonsense about *friendship*. I don’t wish to laugh at romance or poetry,—they are delightful things (what good society would do without them I can’t fancy!—’tis dull enough as it is!), but they must be kept to their proper place. What would you think if your uncle were to insist on wearing his own livery? ’Tis every bit as ridiculous in you to dress your maid like a lady. So, no New World notions; you must settle this at once.”

“Your ladyship need not fear it is my wish to embarrass Miss Ufford, who for a long time has showered her favours upon me. I have already discerned that the season has come for us to separate, and

I have made up my mind to bid her farewell."

"Dear me, this is very comfortable," remarked the Dowager, raising her gold-framed glasses to her eyes, and inspecting me curiously, "I really hadn't expected to find so much good sense and proper feeling in you."

"I am obliged to your ladyship for your approval; and, if you will not think me presumptuous, I will return the compliment by owning that I fully recognise the justice and good sense of your observations to Miss Ufford;—only it perhaps would have better become a lady of your high rank and venerable years to have made them in a manner less likely to wound the feelings of an humble dependant like myself."

The Dowager did not remove her glasses from her eyes, but still holding them up to her organs of sight, she turned slightly in her chair towards her niece, and said with unfeigned surprise, into which no alloy of

mockery entered, "Well now, Caroline, I am glad you've caught this girl and brought her up. I am an old woman, and never saw her like before, though Bishop Percy always told me it would come to this; and I've heard my father say that Mr. Locke—a very clever gentleman, who was a great authority on 'the Human Understanding,'—was of the same opinion. The Bishop declared that ere I died ordinary lady's-maids would talk better and have more wit than Lady Mary Wortley Montague. And so, child—Miriam—(sounds like a Bible name!) you *really* think you have feelings?"

"Oh, no, my lady, I have none. I only meant it would have been more graceful in you just now to have given me credit for a few."

The Dowager let fall her glasses from her left hand, and laughed musically, and with a heartiness that was not uncommon in life when she was young, and, waving her fan round in

her right hand, closed it with a rattle, and brought it down with a smart tap on the table that stood by the side of her chair.

“You’re a saucy wench. I like you in spite of myself,” she resumed frankly, “and I’d hire you for my own maid if it was not that——. No, that would never do. You’re the very image of the young lady my rabbit-mouthed grandson is going to marry, and it would be awkward to have my visitors drawing comparisons between you and the future Countess of Linton-Stetchworth.”

“I am obliged to you, my lady, but I should not wish to be your servant!”

“Ah! and why so?”

“I want a more ordinary person for a mistress.”

“What? So you may make use of her?”

“Exactly.”

“Capital! Caroline, do you hear? I guessed it from her face. And you are right, Miriam. But why not aim higher, and be a

governess? I believe governesses think themselves above maid-servants."

"No, Lady Ufford; I have thought of that, and have decided against it. If I entered a family as a governess, my mistress would begin by despising me, and consequently I should never get into her confidence. But, as a personal attendant, I shall win my way into her, and make her my own."

"Child," cried the Dowager, in the highest good humour, "you're a gem—a jewel! I wish I could be young again, simply for the sake of living in a world peopled with such as you. But I'll help you; tell me your plans."

"I shall go up to London."

"Quite right, my dear!"

"And do my best to make my fortune there—honestly."

"Better still, child!"

"I have not decided exactly how I am to look out for a place. Indeed I am quite ignorant of the ways of London. If your

ladyship could give me any information, or a recommendation to a family, I should feel deeply obliged to you."

"My good girl," responded the lady, "I like helping those who seem inclined to help themselves, and I shall have pleasure in assisting you. See here,—there are notes for 20*l*. Put them into your purse. That's right. I'm pleased with you for not thanking me; it shows you are made of the right stuff, to leave me to assume your gratitude. Now, to-morrow night—or any other night that is more convenient to you—get my coachman to drive you over to Aldeburgh, and put you in the up-mail for London. When you have arrived there, and have alighted in the inn-yard, call a hackney-coach and order the driver to convey you to Stetchworth House, Park Lane. The housekeeper will have received a line from me, and will greet you with a hearty welcome, and do what is best for you. Before you go to bed to-night, I'll

send you a written character.—(Caroline, my dear, leave the room for a minute ; I want to say a few words to Miriam privately.)”

There was a light of surprise in my mistress’s gentle face as she silently obeyed this command, and closed the door behind her.

“Listen to me, child,” said the old woman seriously, and with much kindness in her voice ; “you are no common girl, and if a few honest words of worldly wisdom can save you from ruin, an old woman of ninety years would like to do the good deed of speaking them to you. You are clever, but you’re yet more beautiful. You wont be in London a month before crowds of men of high rank and wealth will follow you about with flattery and offers.”

“Well!” said I, sharply, flushing crimson.

“You needn’t be angry, child. I am not going to insult you, but to tell you a little more of the ways of the world than I care

about my pure-minded grand-daughter knowing. The terms a beautiful woman like yourself may obtain are to be measured exactly by what she likes to demand. If you want to make a good market, fix your price exorbitantly high, and never bate a penny of it. If you drop your price, your game is up. When a rich man makes love to you, say, 'Marry me,' *and stand to it*. And when he consents to marry you, say, 'But I must have a jointure of so much a-year,' *and stand to that also!* If there is one true thing in the world not generally understood, it is that young men of fortune, who have been bred in self-indulgence and the habit of gratifying every passionate caprice, are such sheer fools, utter fools, weak fools, that a beautiful and artful woman may lead them into any absurdity.—There! Get out of the room, girl; I have had enough of you."

I never saw that venerable, clear-sighted dame again; but I left her with a strange sensation that, different as our ranks were,

there was a link of personality between us,—that there was a startling unity in our characters and aims, and that, as she was tottering off the stage, I had come to supply her place.

When I returned to my dear mistress, after quitting the dowager's apartment, we discussed for hours all my plans and projects for the future. She was overpowered with grief at finding that she must part with me, and in no way suspected how well pleased I was with the prospect of quitting her protecting wing; for with many tears and broken utterances I assured her of my ardent gratitude to her and affection for her; I told her that, though I put a merry face on the subject to her grand-mamma, I should never be happy away from her; and I implored her not to forget the poor orphan girl she had cherished and educated,—but to write to her frequently. Nor may it be thought that in so speaking I acted hypocritically. I was sincerely grieved, and

in my many pathetic expressions of sorrow there was no mere simulation. Sadness and bitter dejection weighed upon me, but under their oppression I felt a yearning for action,—a subdued hope that suggested to me I should, ere many suns had set, be sufficiently joyous.

CHAPTER VI.

LONDON.

“YES,” said I, “London is the place for a reasonable human creature to abide in. It has a fit field for the exercise of intellect, and ample concealment for the gratification of—folly.”

I made this profound observation after I had passed three weeks in Stetchworth House, the guest of the Earl’s housekeeper, Mrs. Gelatine. Mrs. Gelatine was herself a character.

The lofty contempt she expressed for "City people and them rubbish" was only equalled by the sublime commiseration with which she alluded to the "*novo reach* and them Pitt creations which would like, poor things, to be the same as us." How this exalted woman came to take such an humble personage as myself into favour, I could never decide; but unquestionably she was very kind to me, and carried out in their most generous spirit the dowager Lady Ufford's directions to her, to show me a little of London life, and then help me to a situation in an opulent family.

Mrs. Gelatine took me for drives in Hyde Park, and to the principal places of amusement in town likely to interest a girl fresh from the country, in a pretty little carriage which she and the butler conjoined to maintain for their united comfort and dignity. Twice we figured in the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth's opera-box, much to the envy of the apprentices in the remote gallery. On such occasions I was

arrayed in an elegant costume lent me by Mrs. Gelatine, and my hair was dressed with artificial flowers, presented to me by the same liberal friend. She gave me also to understand that the Earl had himself ordered her to take me to his box at His Majesty's Theatre, alleging as his reason for such beneficence, that he had seen me accidentally in passing through one of his ante-rooms, and was of opinion that a pretty girl like myself ought to have the best of everything. This compliment, on being repeated to me, brightened my colour, and I dare say made me seem more beautiful than ever, for Mrs. Gelatine proceeded to inform me that the Earl was a princely patron, and prized nothing so highly as feminine attractions.

Amongst other visits which I made under Mrs. Gelatine's guidance were half-a-dozen calls on Mons. Labat, the perfumer and hair-dresser of Oxford-street. This accomplished artist gave me six lessons (at the rate of

two guineas each) in the higher branches of his vocation, instructing me how to dress a lady's hair *à la vierge*, *à la reine*, *à la Josephine*, *à la Mathilde*, and in many other equally fascinating modes. He was very good to me, and ere he dismissed me from his tutelage, more than once assured me of his annoyance that the fact of his having a wife living in a villa at Brompton prevented his revealing to me all the emotions of his heart, "and the merciless laws of your countree render it impossible for an unhappy couple, who have wearied of each other, to seek the consolations of new matrimonies." Poor Mons. Labat, he died before 1858! Before quitting him, I received a valuable piece of advice from the pleasant fellow. "Ma chère," said he at our last interview, putting his hand to his heart and smiling at me over a range of Eau de Cologne bottles, "I am not understood. To this insular vulgar life, Frederic Labat is but little higher than a valet, though perhaps he has doon more

to determine the alliances of the aristocratic houses of Europe than any man living. Only this morning a client of mine—in my prasence—yes, in my prasence,—in my *salon de réception*, as I was passing through it from my carriage,—positively asked one of my junior collaborateurs to *shave him*! Imagine what I felt! To turn my *salon* into a shaving for easiness! ‘Sare,’ answered the young man, ‘the pupil of the illustrious Frederic Labat will live an artist—and die rather than scrape up pence.’ But, ma chère, you oonderstand me, and Frederic Labat, as to a sympathetic mind, gives you this advice,—*If you would get on in this world of Meffair, demand vare moche, and do vare leetle.*”

With similar instructions Mrs. Gelatine loaded me, as she superintended my costume one morning whilst I arrayed myself in a suitable dress for a fashionable lady’s maid, previous to sallying forth to call on Mrs Archer Plumetop, of Portland Place, Regent’s Park.

“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Gelatine, “hold your head up, and let this *novo reach* of a Mrs. Plumetop (the name don’t appear in De Brett or the heralds’ visitations neither) know that you come of an Earl’s family, and trace back to the Conqueror. You have a right to do it, my dear, holding such a character as you do from our dowager-lady. These Plumetops may be well, till something better turn up; but I misdoubt ’em. But you wont find it difficult to throw them over, as you improve your set.”

A few seconds more, and I was in Mrs. Gelatine’s carriage, on my way to Portland Place, catching a glimpse of the traffic of Oxford Street, as I was driven up towards Langham Church. Mrs. Plumetop had requested me to call upon her at eleven o’clock, and I had consented to do so, in spite of the opposition of Mrs. Gelatine, who could not restrain her indignation at Mrs. Archer Plumetop’s audacity in expecting any inmate of Stetch-

worth House to call on her at such an early hour.

The clock of Langham Church struck eleven as my carriage drew up before the Plumetop mansion, and a servant, powdered even at that hour, opened the door to receive me.

"Missus isn't up," said the man, judging from Mrs. Gelatine's carriage and my stylish appearance that I was a lady.

"Yes—she is, for she has requested me to call on her at this hour, and I am sure she would not fail to keep her appointment with me."

"Oh,—then, you're the Stetchworth House applicant?"

"Exactly."

I was forthwith conducted to an ante-room by the footman, who passed on to an interior apartment, and informed its occupants of my arrival.

"Very good, Lacy!" I heard a gentleman's voice (it was a voice of sixty years that tried

to pass for thirty) answer the superb Mr. Lacy, "you can leave us. The young person can wait for a few minutes in the first room, and when Mrs. Archer Plumetop is ready to receive her, I will fetch her in."

Lacy withdrew, but left the door ajar between the first room, in which I sat, and the interior apartment, in which the Rev. Archer Plumetop, his lady, and two daughters, were breakfasting. "If you like to change your place," whispered Lacy to me, as he passed my chair on his way back to his lounge at the hall-window, "and sit near the door, you can hear 'em talking. I left the door ajar a' purpose."

I availed myself of the kindly fellow's arrangements, and heard the following conversation between the Rev. Archer and Mrs. Archer Plumetop, Miss Plumetop, and Miss Geraldine Plumetop.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Archer Plumetop, I think we had better decide to have this

young person," observed Mr. Plumetop unctuously, clinking his coffee-cup against the saucer.

"I should like to see if she is pretty first," said a merry, girlish voice. "As she is to be my maid, I ought to be allowed to say that. I cannot tolerate ugly people."

"My dear Geraldine," objected the lady of the house, "you're too impetuous. What is beauty? My dear child, it is a shadow, a vain desire, a mere albatross—a thing fired at one day and dead the next, a vampire."

"Oh! but, mamma!—"

"My love!—do not contradict me. Will the cold earth its surface break, to show how soft, how smooth a cheek beneath its surface lies? Oh, no—mute, mute, is all o'er beauty's pall! Ah!—I shall never forget how poor Kirke White poisoned himself in a wretched lane leading out of Holborn, because he couldn't bear the barbed arrows of a scornful world."

“Still, mamma dear,” broke in Geraldine, “I like pretty people. I shouldn’t be so fond of you, if you were as fat as Lady Mopus !”

“Well—well—my child ! Geraldine, come and kiss your mamma. Only, my dear, don’t talk to me just now about the Mopuses or the Mansion-house. I am not strong at this season of the year. When I am at Brighton, and have plenty of bracing sea-air, my nerves are in more vigorous tone, and are equal to such a topic.”

“But to return to the great question,” said Mr. Archer Plumetop, “about engaging this young person. It is natural, my dear Geraldine, for you to wish to have a pleasant and agreeable attendant ; but there are many other points of important consideration in the matter. After all, the position which a family is enabled to take in the upper classes depends very much on a judicious selection of servants. Unfortunately, as you are aware, we labour under some disadvantages in the fashionable world. Though your

mamma is descended from a younger branch of the De Courcies—than which a more noble lineage cannot well be imagined—and I am myself of the Plumetops of Hampshire, in point of fact a Hampshire Plumetop, still in the eyes of some we are regarded as—as—I wont say *new*, but as not quite so old as we really are. Since your grandpapa De Courcy—”

“He always called himself Corsy,” plumped in Geraldine with a merry laugh.

“Don’t interrupt papa so, Geraldine. De Courcy is much prettier,” observed Miss Plumetop sharply.

“Well, Frances, dear—don’t be angry—and I’ll be a good girl.”

“Since your grandpapa De Courcy died”—resumed Mr. Archer Plumetop—“and we removed from our humble residence at Stoke Newington to this more suitable abode, our object has been to get into good society. And our object has been to some extent attained.

But how? By what means? Partly, by my taking a prominent position in the charitable world of London; but principally because I have made it a rule never to hire a servant inexperienced in the habits of the aristocracy. Had it not been for this, I could never have put you in the world as I have. Are you not admired frequenters of the Court? Does not your carriage every Drawing-room day, as it proceeds down St. James's Street, attract the attention and elicit the applause of the multitude? Why, it was only last week, Geraldine, that you smiled at a young lad—a fruit-vender—in Piccadilly, who exclaimed as we rolled past him, 'Oh, these *are* real nobs, with the stunningest hosses I have seen to-day.' Nor is this all. Haven't we three barons of the realm, one Scotch earl, and six Irish peers on our visiting list? Didn't the Bishop of London lunch with us, when he preached at our parish church in behalf of the 'Decayed Apple-women'? And when we were

sending out invitations for our last ball, did I not feel myself in a position to transmit cards to his Majesty's equerries and the private secretary of the noble peer who at present guides the vessel of our commonwealth? Of course I am aware that these eminent individuals didn't make their appearance, but—the cards were sent, and we felt that, without subjecting ourselves to any unkind remarks, we could pretend all the evening through to be expecting them to make their appearance. And, moreover, the 'Drawing-room Budget' in its notice of our ball, amongst the other fashionable intelligence, stated that these distinguished personages were unavoidably prevented by *State affairs* from appearing at Mrs. Archer Plumetop's ball."

"Oh, yes, my dear," sighed Mrs. Archer Plumetop with the devotion of an admiring wife,—“you have always managed delightfully for us. I am sure I never expected to live to see it.”

“You’re a dear angel of a papa,” interjected Frances.

“So you are, dear,” observed the audacious Geraldine; “only I wish you would get on—and not prose so—for I want to see my new maid.”

“I wont prose; but I hope, Geraldine, you in your turn will not be disrespectful to your papa,” responded Mr. Archer Plumetop, testily. “I will say nothing more except that I think this young person represents a high aristocratic connection that we should do well in fixing ourselves to. She is recommended by the Dowager Baroness of Ufford. Of course I shall write to Lady Ufford about the girl’s character. Her ladyship will of course reply. That will make us correspondents. If I find her ladyship is at Stetchworth House, or anywhere in the neighbourhood of London, I shall go and call on her for further particulars. That will make us friends. And now, my dear, as you have heard my opinions

on this subject, shall we have Lady Ufford's *protégée* in?"

"By all means. I am dying to see her!" exclaimed Geraldine, vivaciously.

"Then, my dears, arrange yourselves with the composure and dignity of the upper ranks, and I will introduce her to you."

These words had scarcely been uttered, when the door was opened wide, and I was summoned from the ante-room into the breakfast-parlour by an elderly gentleman, dressed in the most accurately-fashioned garments of a drawing-room priest. The Rev. Archer Plumetop was nearly sixty years of age (he had not married young); but a slight and somewhat elegant figure, a luxuriant wig of brown curls, made in imitation of George the Fourth's wigs, and whiskers deeply dyed, so that their colour hovered between lamp-black and violets, gave him the effect of being somewhat younger. His cheeks were pale, and his nose was of that hatchet prominence which is

the first deviation from the aquiline; and there was an air of good-natured pomposity about the entire man which caused me to smile, but at the same time inclined me to regard him amiably.

Mrs. Plumetop was a faded sentimental lady, whose small intelligence had for several years, in company with her personal charms, been on the wane. But if she was a foolish body, she was very good-natured. If she wore very low dresses at evening parties, it was more to please her husband, and fulfil what he solemnly designated her "position in society," than to gratify her personal vanity, that she did so. She had received from her father (Mr. Corsy, the late gigantic coach-builder of Long Acre) two hundred thousand pounds, and this large property was strictly settled on trustees for her use, and the benefit of her children; but the fact of her wealth did not prevent her from being a devoted and admiring wife. Of course such

ladies do not exist now; but in the last generation rich wives often treated their husbands with a disdain and niggard parsimony they would have blushed to display to their tradesmen. But Mrs. Plumetop was not one of these dames; she meekly believed in her husband, and, for the rest, if she manifested in her daily life any positive womanly goodness, it consisted of anxiety to make her daughters enjoy their lives as much as possible, and to assure herself that her servants were happy, and liked their mistress. She was an amiable creature. Her tastes, if not of the highest order, were harmless. She liked fashionable novels and fashionable chapels; she enjoyed shopping in Bond Street, when it wasn't either too hot or too cold,—the shopmen were so very respectful to her; she was pleased when her name, through her dressmaker's influence, appeared in "The Drawing-Room Budget." Although her mild nature was incapable of any strong

emotion, she had what almost deserved to be called a faint enthusiasm for being genteel, and on "reception" nights (her parties were always called "receptions"), when she gazed at her brilliant drawing-rooms, thronged by the representatives of Society, she would contrast them with the homeliness and obscurity of her old sphere at Stoke Newington, and experience a feeble thrill of exultation.

The Rev. Archer Plumetop was a specimen of a class of beings that English society may well be proud of, for there is no other country on the face of the earth where an exactly corresponding body of men can be found. He was a clergyman who had made his game in life by marrying a wealthy tradesman's daughter. Personally, he was a comely fellow; and though he had neither brains nor culture, he was endowed with that faculty which enables a reptile to crawl up a hill which noble animals are not capable of ascending. He had commenced life as a page in a gentle-

man's household, had then become an accountant's clerk, and subsequently at the age of thirty years, through the interest of an ecclesiastical dignitary (whom his waxen face and pink lips and chestnut curls had pleased), had been ordained a clergyman of the Established Church, without a degree, and with only enough learning to be able to read the services without flagrant errors. As a curate, Mr. Archer Plumetop wooed and won Miss Corsy, and for twenty years he discharged the duties of his profession like a respectable man; and, blessed with his wife and two daughters, he led a happy and perhaps useful life, eminently delighted with his sacerdotal position, jealously guarding within his by no means contemptible heart the secret of his humble origin (in this particular not even admitting the wife of his choice into his confidence), and pluming himself not a little on being *in* with all "the genteelest sets" in his parish.

But with the acquisition of the large income derived from his wife's dividends, he adopted a more ambitious style of life. As a chaplain to the sheriff of the city of London he was introduced at Court, and what he saw and felt at St. James's pleased him so much that he lent a small sum of money to an Irish peer (whom he had dined with at the Mansion House); and, in acknowledgment of this substantial courtesy, the Viscount Blarney-stone persuaded the Mistress of the Robes to bring before the notice of beneficent royalty Mrs. Archer Plumetop, Miss Geraldine Plumetop, and Miss Frances of the same name. Naturally the family exulted greatly at this move; for, in attaining their presentations at St. James's without the intervention of a Court-milliner, they not only saved the extra hundred pounds which it is the custom for such an agent to put on the price of the Court dresses, in return for her influence "with a most distinguished leader of the *beau monde*," but they

were also able from that time forth to reflect with edifying severity on her Grace of This, and the Countess of That, who it was well known would introduce *any one*! for Madame Vericourt, if she would only renew their bills. St. James's having been once entered, the Plumetops stuck to it with a loyal fervour that is beyond commendation. To have rightly appreciated the fidelity with which they adhered to their sovereign, one should have heard the criticisms made by the loungers at White's and Boodle's, as the Plumetop equipage in all its floral effervescence swung past their windows.

Of course the Plumetops did not get "into society." Such people never do. But then they had the pleasure of hoping to "get in" one day, and the satisfaction of knowing that their old acquaintances of Stoke Newington believed them to have arrived at the object of their desires. They were wise and prudent in many respects. They did not commit

themselves to a pedigree, but, instead of hanging on their walls a genealogical tree, contented themselves with general assertions of the dignity of the Hampshire Plumetops, and frequent allusions to the noble lineage of the De Courcies. Of course they had arms; every one, with legs, has them now-a-days. They staked heavily on public benevolence, and occasionally pocketed considerable winnings. They subscribed largely to hospitals, and, as a consequence, often managed to scrape acquaintance with the patrons of such institutions. A donation of 100*l.* to the "Sons of the Clergy" procured the Rev. Archer Plumetop the honour of being shaken cordially by the hand by his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, at the annual dinner of that charity; a yet more magnificent gift of 200*l.* at the anniversary banquet of "The Hospital for Veterans" gained within three days a nod from *the* Duke of Wellington in Pall Mall; and when he transmitted to her Grace the

Duchess of Pottlebury 250*l.* for the “Decayed Applewomen,” in whom her Grace was deeply interested as “Patroness of the Decayed Applewomen’s Hospital,” that noble lady, in an autograph letter, acknowledging the receipt of the draft, averred that the Rev. Archer Plumetop was “a benefactor of his species, and a Christian gentleman.”

For the most part, the acquaintances of the family were drawn from their own class—colossal cheesemongers, British merchants, keen-witted London tradesmen, blessed with opulence, and cursed with a foolish shame of the source from which it came. Nine out of every ten visitors who entered Mrs. Plumetop’s drawing-room spent several hours of each day east of Temple Bar, or derived their incomes from the shops and wharves of the City; but still they always alluded to “the City” as an outlandish quarter of the capital, which they believed had been accidentally left and forgotten by the

Romans when they quitted the island. They met each other, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves at civic banquets and balls, but in the West they were utterly oblivious of everything that had transpired in the East, that any balls had taken place, that any dinner had come off at the Mansion House. And if any were courageous enough to acknowledge having been present at such entertainments, they always did so apologetically. "Why, you see, we could not help going to the Goldsmiths' Ball," the originator of a ventilated silk-hat would say; "Mrs. Alderman Anchovypaste is a good-natured woman—a really good soul—and my wife likes being kind to her; and, as there was no House of Commons to attend, and my girls wished to show their kind feeling to our very worthy friend, we went." Or a lady would observe, "Well, there's *no good* denying it, we *were* at the Mansion House. You see, the Lady Mayoress was an old schoolfellow of mine; and she was

a sweet, lovely girl, and nothing would induce me to drop her, although she did marry beneath her." Sometimes, but very rarely, these funny people suggested that they attended the Eastern festivities because they felt it incumbent on the aristocracy of a country "to countenance the industrial classes," and on one occasion I heard a Lord Mayor assert that he had "taken office" solely for the sake "of drawing together the bonds of social existence."

I speedily came to terms with the lady of the house, and gained from her all the points which Mrs. Gelatine had counselled me to stand out for. My accomplishments and recommendations were of the highest order, and I of course expected a liberal remuneration from the employer of my valuable services. I demanded that it should be distinctly understood that I was solely and peculiarly Miss Geraldine's maid, and that if, in the plenitude of my goodness, I rendered any assistance to

other members of the household, such assistance should be regarded as altogether voluntary. As to salary, 50*l.* per annum and old dresses would satisfy me to begin with. Mrs. Plumetop opened her eyes, and implied timidly that she thought my demand exorbitant. Instead of taking notice of this faint opposition, I went on to stipulate for a private sitting-room, the privilege of having a hot dinner in my own apartment whenever I felt disinclined for the society of the servants, and, *of course*, wax lights—an indulgence conceded to all ladies of my rank in families of *the highest distinction*. This last stroke of the wax-lights won the game for me. Mrs. Plumetop saw that it would be useless to offer resistance to me—that she would be only compromising herself in the eyes of Society by any attempt to do so. So I was taken at my own valuation; and the Rev. Archer Plumetop spent the next month in calling on all his friends, and explaining to each of them separately that his daughter

Geraldine had acquired “a perfect treasure of a maid—sent her, as an especial favour, by her venerable friend the Dowager Lady Ufford.”

Geraldine was a lively little creature; petite and airy in figure and carriage; delicately moulded, naïve, high-spirited, and clever. There was such a fragility about her childish beauty that one longed to cosset and pet her like a nursery darling, but the young lady's tongue soon let you know that she could take care of herself. Her temper was admirable, but under her never-failing cheerfulness and affability of manner I, from the commencement of my acquaintance with her, discerned a firmness of character, which informed me that, though a ravishingly pretty toy to look at, she was not to be played with.

The centre of her heart was made of unwrought iron, but on its surface the affections played with healthy activity. She became, in a fortnight's time, as she imagined, roman-

tically fond of me. My beauty had captivated her, and she had wit enough to appreciate my conversation, and know that it was superior to anything she heard from the frequenters of her mamma's drawing-rooms. She was just three-and-twenty years of age (four or five years older than myself; but this she did not know, for I had given myself out to be four-and-twenty, and I knew how to make myself look it). Her sister was more than three years her senior, and was beginning to be disappointed and hipped.

"Poor Frances, she doesn't look happy—does she, Miriam?" said my young mistress to me, when I had been in her service several months, and I was putting her to bed after a Mansion House ball.

"Indeed, she doesn't, Miss Geraldine."

"Give me a little more chocolate, and boil up the milk, dear,—it's cold. Yes, she does look wretchedly, poor girl!—and no wonder—no wonder!"

“Indeed, miss?”

“Isn’t it enough to make any girl sad, to see the best years of her life run by, and yet find herself unmarried?”

“But why doesn’t she marry? She’s pretty, Miss Geraldine.”

“H-m!—do you think so? *You are*, Mirry—(what a freak it was for Nature to make you a servant!)—but as for Frances, I think she is getting as ugly as an old pitcher. I declare, if I were a man, I would as soon marry the stone effigy of old Queen Anne in St. Paul’s Cathedral as her. Oh, dear me!—when she sang to-night her Italian song about her heart being young and full of hope, I should have laughed if I had not been so near crying.—A little more hot milk, dear, and another rusk.”

“But she is rich, Miss Geraldine; and surely, though she may not be able to catch fish with live bait, she might tempt them with artificial flies.”

“Nay,” returned the vivacious little beauty, sitting up in her bed and speaking with increased emphasis, “she is a doomed old maid !”

“Who’s to blame ?”

“The Rev. Archer Plumetop, my dear. He is the cause of all the mischief and misery. Why, Frances might have married well over and over again if she had been left to herself ; —but every man who comes near us is warned off unless he has a million of money, or a beggarly title and a bald head. But papa is so foolish ! Why, the respectable members of the aristocracy would as soon think of siding with the revolutionists as of marrying us. But the Reverend Archer Plumetop doesn’t see that ; and he persists in disgusting all the sensible people of our acquaintance by saying that he cannot think of letting his daughters marry unless they gain titles by doing so. Oh, Mirry, my dear, what a thing it is to be Hampshire Plumetop !”

“Really ’tis a sad thing for your sister.”

“*Sad?*—sad you call it? Why, it’s positively horrible! But the worst of it is, Frances was *bonâ fide* in love once with a young clergyman—such a nice, dear fellow, with a wonderful talent for drawing caricatures; but he was sent to the right-about over the hall steps directly it was discovered; and she is one of those awkwardly-contrived persons who can’t fall in love half-a-dozen times, and like it the last time rather better than the first.”

“Oh, I do hope, my dear Miss Geraldine, you won’t be as unfortunate as Miss Plumetop.”

“Don’t you fear, Mirry, for me. I don’t seem a likely one to play the mild game Frances has played; do I? No, the difference will be this—Frances has always thought it right, like a dutiful child, to refer her lovers to papa. I haven’t. So I don’t expect much trouble when I state the affair, as settled on and accomplished in my own mind, to the Rev. Archer Plumetop to-morrow.”

“To-morrow !”

“Yes, to-morrow morning. I have had an offer to-night, and accepted it.”

“Dear me, Miss Geraldine ! Who is the gentleman ?”

“A Mr. Aubrey. He is one of our City friends who never, by any chance, go into the City. Papa will make a fuss because he is not a member of an old family, but we shall be able to get over that difficulty ; for Mr. Aubrey is possessed of large property, is a director of some extraordinary bank that has oceans of money, and is an accomplished gentleman (and that can’t be said of most of the men who come to this house), and, what’s more, he is intimate with lots of grand people.”

I, of course, gave Miss Geraldine the proper amount of congratulations on having captured the man of her heart, and, in return, learnt from her that he was tall, and not very handsome, but possessed a fine black beard and moustache, was at least ten years older than

herself, and had singularly delightful powers of conversation. When she had given me these and various other equally valuable pieces of information, the young lady said she wished to go to sleep, and then, coiling up her limbs into a cosy knot, she fell off almost instantly into a tranquil slumber, and looked little like one in whose heart the roguish boy had just placed an arrow. I watched for a few seconds her slight face, its delicate features, soft clear complexion, and tiny pink lips. I touched a stray lock of her chestnut-brown hair, almost sunny enough to be called golden; I just managed to restrain myself from stroking the curve of her blue-veined wrist, which peeped out above the coverlet; and then I noiselessly drew the muslin curtains round her, and turned away to leave the room.

But when I reached the door, some indescribable influence, calling up in an instant of time a host of quaint fancies and superstitious feelings, caused me to retrace my steps and

take another look at her through the snowy draperies that enveloped her; and as I did so, it seemed that a voice—clear, slow, and solemn as a church-bell—smote upon me thus:—

“Miriam Copley!—Miriam Copley!—that bewitching, sprightly little doll, sleeping there so tranquilly, is a dangerous toy.”

The next day Geraldine imparted her secret to her papa and mamma; and, as she had anticipated, the opposition she met with was not great. Papa, indeed, said that the Plumetops were not in the habit of allying themselves with simple commoners, and mamma suggested that a descendant of the De Courcies might have looked higher; but, these gentle protests having been duly made and registered, they admitted the prospect was not a bad one. Mr. Aubrey was well esteemed by the most influential of their friends; he was reputed to be rich, and was unquestionably associated with great capi-

talists in important commercial operations ; moreover, he was of a gentlemanly exterior, had travelled, and, though not a man of fashion himself, lived with men who were. Mr. and Mrs. Plumetop therefore “gave their consent,” being induced thereto, perhaps, by some genuine anxiety for their child’s happiness ; for though they were snobs they were kindly people. Indeed, I have through life found snobs, as a rule, quite the reverse of the hateful and contemptible beings which they are usually represented to be. I have generally found them amusing rather than dangerous—more pleasant than odious. As the world goes, the Reverend Archer Plumetop and his lady were not bad kind of people—indeed, they were much better than many whose lives were less open to ridicule. Of their ample income a considerable portion was expended in charity ; their amusements were polite, and not devoid of pursuits calculated to refine the taste and even

stimulate the intellect; they found genuine pleasure in good pictures, music, and *belles lettres*; in money matters they were strictly honourable, and in their opinions they were not intensely illiberal. They kept their tempers, when at home, as well as when they were in society, and, without professing to be spiritually much in advance of their neighbours, they gave a cordial support to the social moralities, and took much pains to make their friends enjoy themselves. What more would any reasonable person require his friends to do? Let us grant they lacked self-respect, and that their aims in life were paltry, their ambitions very silly. Well, my gentle readers, are you prepared to throw stones at them for these defects? Do your hearts never flutter when you hear a great man's step in your hall? Take stock of the grand purposes of your lives, on which you pride yourselves so much; count them up; measure them—with a little dishonesty, if

you will—making them stand on tiptoes, and cribbing half an inch with your lying foot-rule; add up their inches, and, when you have deducted from their magnificence all that is mere “*vanitas vanitatum*,” compare them with the objects for which your condemned brethren, the snobs, are striving. What is the difference? I am afraid that He who judges hearts discerns but little.

Anyhow, on this occasion, the Plumetops, *père et mère*, did not behave otherwise than as the most elevated Christians would have done. They shed a few tears, gave Miss Geraldine a blessing, and sent a note to Mr. Aubrey, asking him to come the next day to luncheon. Mr. Aubrey of course came, and repeated his visits daily. The entire family, as well as Geraldine, was soon permeated by Aubrey. Whatever the topic was that happened to be discussed, the name of Aubrey was sure to turn up in it. Mr. Aubrey’s opinions about dinners, Mr. Aubrey’s fancies about

flowers, Mr. Aubrey's concerts!—Aubrey, Aubrey, Aubrey, was the burden of every variation in the domestic concert. Dinner-parties were made up in Portland Place, so that “all the connection” might become better acquainted with Mr. Aubrey; when the Plumetops went out to dinners or routs, it was in the expectation of meeting Mr. Aubrey at them; and when they stayed within, it was that they might be at home when Mr. Aubrey called. Geraldine passed her days in a state of the most blissful excitement. At first she fancied, as she drove through the streets of the West End, that everyone looked at her and thought, “Ah! that is the girl who is engaged to Mr. Aubrey.” She had also a general notion that she deserved to be applauded wherever she went, for having done something very praiseworthy and unusual; and at the same time, in flat contradiction to the feeling just mentioned, she could not disabuse herself of the very erroneous and

absurd impression that all the unmarried girls of her acquaintance were either engaged, or on the point of entering on that very interesting estate which hovers between the married and single, and like widowhood has the dignity of both conditions, and the inconveniences of neither. Speak, ye married women, and say would you not like either to be engaged girls once again, or well-jointured widows?

It was arranged that the engagement should continue for nine or ten months before the marriage was solemnized. The time, perhaps, was rather too long, for, though in the case of superior people an engagement of six years' duration does good rather than harm, where ordinary people are concerned, a probation of six weeks, to admit of the settlements being comfortably drawn up, is quite long enough.

I, of course, often had opportunities of seeing Mr. Aubrey, and also of being seen by him; but, though I was at considerable pains to watch him, from secret posts of observation,

I always took care that he should not behold me. He was an imposing, manly fellow, so far as appearance went; and if the expression of his mouth was sinister, he did his best to hide it and the rest of his face by an abundance of well-trimmed beard and moustache. I had a reason for not wishing him to see me till I had had leisure to deliberate with myself, and ponder well what line of action I would adopt under certain circumstances, and what line under others. For Mr. Aubrey was an old friend of mine, and I did not want him to be aware that I was a spectator of his operations, until such time as it should be my humour to recognise him.

Ere many months — indeed, ere many weeks—had passed, this humour seized me, and I made myself known to him. Our house in Portland Place was a corner house, near the Regent's Park, and was flanked by a spacious high-walled garden, which could be entered from a side-street by a small postern-gate. A

key of this gate had been given to Mr. Aubrey, and he was in the habit of using it frequently on entering the premises, invariably on leaving them. It was at the commencement of a new year, when the Plumetops, after a few weeks at Baden, and a month at Brighton, had inaugurated a fresh series of entertainments, prior to Geraldine's wedding, which was to eventuate in the full blaze of the London season, that Mr. Aubrey quitted one of Mrs. Plumetop's parties (she, of course, always called them receptions) by his customary route through the garden. Most of the company had left, but still enough people remained in the drawing-rooms to keep the entertainment up for half an hour, or more than that, longer. Secure, therefore, of not being immediately required by my mistress, I slipped downstairs and glided into the garden in pursuit of Mr. Aubrey. His hand was turning the key of the private gate, when I, unheard, came close up to him, under the dark cover of privet-

bushes and yew-trees, and said, "Stephen Watson, I want to speak with you!"

The man staggered round. It was too dark for me to see his face, but I could hear his heart thump against the walls of his chest.

"Who are you?" he gasped, fitfully recovering a little of his self-command. "Who are you? You are mistaken. My name is not Stephen Watson."

"Pish!"

"You are in error. I can only repeat it. You may be incredulous; but I am, all the same for that, only stating the fact."

"No trifling!" I returned angrily; "you are Stephen Watson, and not two years since you were Mr. Rawleigh Ufford's valet."

"Indeed!—and who may you be?"

"A friend, or an enemy. I will be either; and you shall elect which of the two it shall be."

"I mean, what is your name?"

"Come with me out of the darkness of this shrubbery, and when you see me in the full

light of the library window you will not need me to tell you who I am."

As I said this, I put out my slender hand and laid it firmly on his muscular arm, that could with a blow have felled me dead at his feet. For a few brief seconds he hesitated, and then reluctantly followed me to a spot where he had a perfect sight of my form and features. I saw him too. His eyes gleamed with a devilish fire, and the expression of his face was so intensely wicked that I trembled in spite of myself. There was a cold frosty wind blowing through the trees, and I had no bonnet on, nor any covering beyond my ordinary indoor dress, but there was no chill in the hot streams that ran through my veins and arteries. I heard the harp and piano, and the hum of voices in the drawing-room, but they did not divert my attention from the important business in hand.

"Yes!—it is you! I felt it when you first touched me. You are Miriam Copley?"

"I am."

"Well?"

"Well!"

"You have me in your power to a certain extent."

"I have."

"And I doubt not you will use your power prudently."

"Possibly I shall indulge myself in the pleasure of abusing it."

"No, you wont. You are too wise a woman. You have *your* way to make in the world, just as I have *mine*. As far as sympathy goes, you will be on my side. How can you *feel* for or *with* a mistress? But you can make common cause with one of your own class—a fellow-servant."

"Fudge!"

"At least, you'll not be blind to your own interests."

"Now you are talking more sensibly."

"Ha! ha! Come, then, I see we under-

stand each other. We shall come to terms without difficulty. We mayn't stop here longer to-night, however. Go in now, and be sure that whatever you demand in reason, Stephen Watson (or John Aubrey) will pay you. I am a business man, and am ready to pay liberally for what I stand in need of. I require your silence for the next six months; sell it to me at what price you like."

As he finished this sentence, he turned away to quit me, but I arrested him by saying:—

"Halt! I must have a few more words with you."

"Speak on, but make haste. It would be ruination to me, and not any good to you, if I were caught here."

"You're a clever fellow, Mr. Aubrey, and, just to gratify my curiosity, you must tell me how it is you have raised yourself to your present position."

"I will be as communicative as you can

desire at a suitable season ; but just now I must be curt. I have not been in Mr. Ufford's service for some time. I left it immediately after the duel. Ever since I first entered service as a boy of twelve years, luck has favoured me. I have worked hard, of course ; but I have also been fortunate. I saved my wages and made a lot of successful speculations. When Mr. Ufford went abroad, and left Miss Wingfield to that chicken-hearted Lord Cheveley, he gave me a present of a thousand pounds, and I found myself owner of a clear eight thousand pounds. A man with brains, who knows the world, understands business, and has that amount of money in his pocket, must be a dull dog if he cannot get on. You can guess the rest."

"Do you know where your master is now ?"

"Yes—he is at Venice. He writes to me occasionally, when he wants any business transacted in England. I am his agent."

“Does he know of your change of name?”

“Oh, yes. He advised the alteration.”

“He advised the alteration?”

“Ah! you are surprised.”

“I am.”

“You wont be after a little explanation. You see he is as fine, generous-hearted, high-couraged a man as can be found in all the nobility of England (and that’s saying no little, let me tell you, Miriam). But his affair down in the country strangely altered him. He took to sneering at everything and everybody; he gave up his reading and care for politics, and went in for every kind of dissipation. He took to going every night to Crockford’s, and he got the idlest and the most expensive of his old Oxford and Guards friends round him. This was the game for about a month; and then, as you know, he went straight off to the South, but Mademoiselle Rosenesse, Lord Ringbolt’s seventeen-year-old, followed him by the next packet.”

“And he, amongst his other sarcasms, counselled you to assume a gentlemanly name, and to start as a gentleman?”

“Exactly so. And, what is more, he gave me, before he left, introductions—me, me, ‘his valued friend Mr. Aubrey’—to some City firms that the Linton-Stetchworth family have patronized, and forthwith my game was made. If I am anything more than I deserve to be, it must be attributed to my old master’s kindness. Now, Miriam Copley, I’m off!”

CHAPTER VII.

MORE MOVES, AND CHECK BY MY ADVERSARY'S
QUEEN.

I DID not debate, in a set fashion, which side I should take in the game that was being played under my eyes. At first I endeavoured to defer deciding, and to let things flow on in their course undisturbed by me. It would be unjust to myself to say that I had not some loyal yearnings to my lively little mistress. Her beauty and vivacity had charmed me almost as much as mine had pleased her ; and

I could not but pity her for the lot which, unconscious of its nature, she wished to make her own. The tingling of my nerves convinced me that John Aubrey was an unscrupulous and unfeeling man, and I shuddered at the thought of all the misery and shame my plaything Geraldine would have to undergo in consequence of marrying him.

But, on the other hand, there were many reasons why I should be Aubrey's ally. He had said truly that my sympathies must be more with one of my own rank—trying to win at the same difficult game as I myself was playing at—than with a mistress; and unquestionably, had I not conceived a feeling of strong aversion to the man, attachment to my class would have outweighed my sense of duty to my employer. But against my strong repugnance to the man, other feelings and associations came into operation. He had been the servant of Rawleigh Ufford, and still lived under Rawleigh Ufford's protection. It was pleasant to me to

look at anything my hero had touched. Had a button from his coat fallen in my way, I should have picked it up and cherished it, valuing it more highly than a precious stone. How much more had a living creature, on whom the mantle of his patronage had fallen, a claim on my interest and care! *He* desired to see his valet become an eminent and powerful man. I sympathized proudly with the insolent scorn of this wish, and conceived that in doing my best to gratify it I should be making myself a participator in Rawleigh's magnificent contempt for the world which had wronged him, and should be rendering myself worthy of his gratitude and affection.

Still, as I have already said, I abstained from deliberately reviewing these and divers other counter-considerations, and balancing them against each other. Eventually I became Aubrey's zealous partizan, but I did not embark in his cause, as the sequel will show, with any pre-arrangement of design or calculation,

but under the impulse of violent passions which unlooked-for occurrences called into action.

Geraldine was passionately in love. She had never before taken a liking for any man ; and, as a natural consequence, her love was enthusiastic, uncalculating, and overpowering. An egotistic confusion of the subjective and objective has given birth to a general impression that such affection is rare, and can exist only in nobler natures. But it does not require much sagacity to discern that the strong agitation of the feelings in early life, which we call "first love," is a condition as little influenced by the intellect as hunger or thirst are. It is an appetite that, like the other appetites of our nature, affects us universally. I am a fastidious person, and when I am faint, I should doubtless turn away with distaste from the crust and sour bone on which the beggar would make a hearty meal ; but still I cannot disguise from myself that the craving which my educated nerves

entertain for a fricassee and a glass of moselle is physiologically identical with that which makes Hodge's eyes water over a Suffolk dumpling. My sisters, therefore, must not exclaim against me, when I assert that Geraldine, though she was a girl devoid of high aspirations, indeed (in the language of Rosa-Matilda) was "altogether without soul," was perfectly steeped and entranced in love.

Every day she increased in beauty. It is strange how the desire to be loved and the indulgence of loving invariably operate by making young creatures lovable. If I was a sentimentalist, I would enlarge on this thought till I became tiresome. By instinct Geraldine now always selected the colours that best suited her; whereas, previously, she had frequently annoyed me by an unaccountable fondness for maize or green. Instead of wasting the accustomed hours over her toilet, she became ravishing without an effort. The

ringlets and braids of her hair fell into shape under my fingers with a readiness that astonished me; and everything she wore, or did, or said, was a-glow with triumph and the exhilaration of success. Her sister and she seemed to grow fonder of each other: Frances was ever making noiseless demonstrations of sisterly devotion, and Geraldine responded to these manifestations with much winning earnestness of manner, and a certain humility of tenderness, as if she felt that, though she was the more fortunate, Frances was the better sister.

At this crisis I received an announcement of another love affair, which for a few days caused the splendour of Geraldine's romance to pale. Caroline Ufford wrote to me, informing me that she was engaged to General Sir John Clayton, a gallant officer, considerably her senior, and that she contemplated proceeding with him almost immediately to India, where he held an important command. She

explained to me that Sir John Clayton had seen and greatly admired her when she was a very young girl, little more than sixteen years of age, and had withdrawn himself from the society in which he was likely to meet her, out of a consideration that it was incumbent on a man of his years to do his utmost to overcome a passion for a mere child. It appeared, also, that the manly soldier had proposed to her soon after she commenced her residence in Laburnum Cottage, on which occasion she had accorded his petition a refusal, "not then," (as she expressed it) "fully appreciating the love so delicately proffered to her, and possibly cherishing in her weak heart hopes she ought never to have entertained." The lengthy epistle from which the above words are extracted contained an account of her future husband's professional career, from his youth upwards, the brilliant actions in which he had been distinguished, and the honours he had won. It enumerated also the principal

qualities of his chivalric nature, and embodied many simple anecdotes, such as a simple lady would feel pride in reciting, that were intended to show me how fortunate a woman Caroline Ufford was. It was a frank, dignified, and pleasant letter. In its womanly goodness of matter and style there was a solemnity of purpose, which contrasted painfully with the silly worldliness in which I had lived since leaving the service of the highly-tempered creature who penned it.

Caroline made no allusion of any kind to her cousin Rawleigh; but her total silence on that subject was to me more eloquent than any pathetic sentence that the strong simplicity of her pen could have produced. I had already learnt from Mr. Aubrey that she had been informed of her cousin's extravagances and sin—(ay, sin!—for her charity never misled her judgment). Indeed it was impossible that it should be otherwise. The circumstances preceding Rawleigh Ufford's departure from

England had aroused so much attention, and his mode of life on the Continent had been so notorious, that she could not have remained in ignorance of its worst features, even if she had not been surrounded with relations who had sufficient reasons for wishing to disabuse her of "all remains of her absurd and childish sentimentality about her scape-grace cousin."

I was not, therefore, surprised at her forbearing from any allusion to the hero of her young romance. Neither was I astonished that she did not invite me to return to her, but, on the contrary, candidly told me that she meant to leave England for the East, without bidding me farewell in person. She had rather not see me (she owned); the sight of me would renew old associations and memories, which she trusted she should be enabled to prevent from occupying too large a share of her thoughts; and therefore she sent me a long good-bye—on paper, but

trusted that, years hence, she should hear of my happiness and usefulness.

I felt acutely the kindness of my dear benefactress. I was sincerely delighted with having one more proof of her affection and grand simplicity of mind, which enabled her to regard as a friend worthy of every womanly confidence and respect one who was so far removed from her socially, and whom she had seen in a condition of absolute ignominy. But, apart from this feeling of satisfaction and sincere pleasure at the cheerfulness with which she wrote, I experienced nothing but a sense of keen, cruel sorrow from her letter. All that it said, and all that it left unsaid, suggested, in humiliating terms, a contrast between her nature and my own; and, as I contemplated her gentle fortitude, her pure-mindedness, and her freedom from every taint of selfishness, and thought how they were soon to be removed farther than ever from the possibility of exercising a healthy influence on my

uncertain existence, and, moreover, how, even if they were once more brought to bear upon me, and be, as in the Aldeburgh days, the very atmosphere of my daily life, they would be powerless to win me from evil, and probably would irritate into contempt for the good,—a violent trembling seized me, and with fear I raised my hands before my eyes, so as to shut out the cheerless gloom and the spectral horror of the future.

Geraldine rallied me for being low-spirited, and questioned me closely as to the cause of my dejection:—Had I received bad news from home? Was I uneasy on any score where she could give me comfort? To these and a hundred other similar questions, kindly put, I replied evasively. At first I did not like to reveal the confidence my benefactress had condescended to place in me. It seemed to me that it would be base to gossip about the love-secrets of Caroline Ufford. But ere long I changed my determination to hold them

sacred. I heard Geraldine and her sister conversing in French. They did not often exchange words in that language, save when they desired to discuss matters of which they intended me to be ignorant. Of course I never let them suspect that I was a better French scholar than either of them. On the present occasion the young ladies took it into their heads to rattle out their French Anglicisms about me, and I was not a little tickled by Miss Geraldine nodding her head gravely, and saying she was afraid I was unhappy about some love affair—possibly about Lacy or the butler. However amusing this was to me, I deemed it prudent not to let my young lady remain under her erroneous impression; and, as I could not state that I was not in love with Lacy without betraying my acquaintance with the French language, I decided that it would be best to impart to her a certain amount of the real cause of my moodiness. It occurred, also, to me, that it would

most likely advance my credit with the young lady to let her see the familiarity with which my former mistress had been, and was still, pleased to treat me.

This last-mentioned thought no sooner struck me than I fell into a communicative vein, and told Geraldine that my sadness was occasioned by learning that my former mistress (I might say "friend," for she had allowed me to call her so) was about to marry a distinguished General, and go to India, where, doubtless, the horrible climate would speedily destroy her,—for she was very delicate. Of course Geraldine was interested (she was always curious about the proceedings of the Ufford family, and I often found it difficult to conceal from her how little I knew about them); and when, after briefly stating the principal points of the case, I showed her the letter I had received, beginning "Dear Miriam," and ending "Your loving friend, Caroline Ufford," it seemed as if my young

mistress's astonishment at Miss Ufford's condescension would find no limit. Nor was the move less successful as regarded the other members of the Plumetop family, for, from that very day till I quitted their service, the Reverend Archer Plumetop and his lady persisted in calling me "Miss" Copley. The worthy gentleman himself requested me, as a particular favour, to allow him to peruse the delightful letter which he was informed by his daughter I had received from the accomplished niece of the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth. I of course acceded to this petition; and when Mr. Plumetop returned the epistle to me, he begged leave to assure "Miss" Copley that he trusted she would for many a day be "the friend" of his daughter. And in conclusion, he added, that if "Miss Copley" wished at any time to call on any friend at Stetchworth House or elsewhere, he hoped she would not hesitate to make use of his clarence, or any one of his other carriages.

Never a day passed on which John Aubrey did not visit Portland House. He was a most attentive lover. And it was a rare exception to the general rule, when he came to the house, and I failed to have a few private words with him. I waylaid him in the garden, or met him at the corner of the street after dusk, or ran in upon him as he sat alone in one of the drawing-rooms, awaiting the advent of his mistress. Instead of seeming to dislike my presence, he always manifested great pleasure at my appearance, and even went so far as to assure me that he should not pay his addresses to Geraldine so assiduously, had she not had me for her maid. He professed a warm admiration for my beauty, and I permitted him to pay me all the customary compliments by which men are accustomed to signify to the women of their choice that they esteem them as toys more than ordinarily pretty. He made me presents: silk kerchiefs, rings for my fingers,

a bracelet, a necklace, and a box or two of kid gloves. He had the good taste never to offer me money, but he informed me that he intended presenting me with a thousand pounds on his wedding morning. Occasionally he offered me the gallantry of a kiss, and I did not repulse him ; but, as I accepted the attention, I thought of Rawleigh Ufford, and the bright crisp morning when he kissed me at the door of Laburnum Cottage.

In short, the admirer and the maid of Miss Geraldine Plumetop entered upon a flirtation. I believe (but it is possible that woman's vanity may partly be the cause of this belief) that John Aubrey was incited to this line of conduct by a genuine and hearty enjoyment of my fascinations. He had wit enough to relish my wit ; he had an adventurer's sympathy with the beautiful girl he had seen in the garb of beggary ; and, as a man endowed with a strong sensuous temperament, and by no means devoid of mental culture, he

spoke, I doubt not, the truth, whenever he made his oft-repeated declaration that I was the most charming creature he had ever seen. But I did not in any way soften to him. I found him, on examination, altogether a superior man to what I had for years judged him. I found in him a strong clear intellect, ambition for honourable distinction, and the acquirements and manners of educated society. I was also compelled to acknowledge that he had a certain manly ruggedness of aspect, which was the exact reverse of what one would expect to discover in a man of very humble extraction, who had spent many years in menial servitude. Still I maintained my mistrust of him, and continued to feel a cold shiver of repugnance steal over me whenever he approached me. It would be difficult to state the motives which combined to make me, in spite of this constitutional antagonism, submit to—ay, and enjoy—his homage. I was a woman, and therefore was

gratified by such respect. It pleased me to see the sway I could hold over the feelings of another, whilst I all the time remained cool and self-possessed. To recognise this power within me, to exercise it, to measure its extent, to coquet with it, were so many ways of assuring myself that I could govern thousands instead of one, if circumstances favoured. Moreover, in my perverted mind there was an unworthy pleasure in reflecting that I, the servant, was first, where Geraldine, the mistress, was second.

Months wore on, and it was summer-time. Geraldine's wedding-day had twice been fixed, and twice postponed, once out of respect to the memory of a royal duke, who, much against his will, had died, and once to suit the pleasure of a Scotch peer, whose presence at the ceremony the Plumetops wished to obtain ; but again, and positively for the last time, the important day was named. Caroline Ufford had no such delays to

submit to. During the cold winds of Spring she was married; and from on board the vessel which conveyed her to India she wrote me a few more last lines of brief farewell.

It was at this time, when we were positively within a fortnight of the day fixed for Geraldine's wedding, that, on entering my young lady's private sitting-room, one warm, serene noontide, I was accosted by her in the following manner:—

“And now, Miriam,” she said, with her customary sprightliness of tone, and without any sign of the anger that raged at her heart, “perhaps, if you are not otherwise engaged, you'll amuse me with a full, clear, and exact account of all that passed between you and Mr. Aubrey, when you waylaid him last night in the green-house.”

I started at these words with surprise.

“Ha! ha!” she laughed merrily, plucking a flower to pieces, and playfully throwing the fragments in a shower over her head. “I

had my eyes on you, though you thought I had gone upstairs to bed. You lovely rogue!—then you deemed it nothing more than your right to throw a little banter at your young lady's hero, and frighten him into fearing that you could and would induce me to throw him over at the last moment? Come, no more blushes, child!"

"What need of my talking, Miss Geraldine," I answered, stammering in my confusion, "since you overheard us?"

"Nay, Miriam, I did not hear what you said. You had prudently shut the doors of the green-house, and I was afraid to open them, lest I should disturb you. But I saw you."

"Indeed, Miss Geraldine, I beg your pardon if you are offended at anything you saw. The truth is, we ladies' maids do sometimes lack amusement, and it is a rule with us—a point of honour—to extort a certain amount of attention from the gentlemen who pay

their addresses to our ladies. So when I, last night, saw Mr. Aubrey go through the green-houses, I ran after him, and had a merry word with him. He is a very lively, handsome gentleman. But I need not assure you, Miss Geraldine (indeed, you would not wish me to do so), that I said nothing to him which I should blush to repeat to you."

"You're blushing enough now, anyhow," she exclaimed, laughing again merrily, "but you needn't vex yourself, Mirry, to invent excuses and apologies. I can't quarrel with your taste in thinking it pleasant to exchange a few words with Mr. Aubrey; and I certainly should not have my present high opinion of him, if I thought he was unable to discern in you the most kissable girl in all London,—for your rank. Ha! ha! I saw him kiss you."

"He never did it before, Miss Geraldine; and last night, it was only once!"

These words threw Geraldine into such an immoderate fit of laughter that I

really thought some mischief would have ensued from the violence of her mirthful demonstrations. The little beauty grasped her tiny waist in her small hands, and reeled to-and-fro, shaking her ringlets, and pouring out bravuras of delight, till the tears of excitement ran from her eyes over her dimpled cheeks.

“But why did you not kiss him in return?” she inquired, checking herself in a fresh peal of laughter.

“My dear Miss Geraldine,” I answered gravely, and with a slight air of offence, “you have no right to think I would forget my duty to you, even if I was careless of what is due to myself.”

“All right, my dear girl,” replied Geraldine in an off-hand manner. “I can trust you. But you mayn’t be angry with me. I have known you long enough now to be allowed to take a few liberties with you. And, to change the subject, I will pass on to the business that

made me just now ring for you. I want you to be my messenger this morning to Lady Titler's, at Fulham. Papa's clarence is already ordered for you to make the drive in. So haste, and put on your bonnet, and when you are ready, come to me for a note and more directions."

I remarked with astonishment the readiness with which Geraldine drew in her horns at the first clouding of my brows. I noticed also that, though she laid aside her noisy manner, and returned to her ordinary demeanour, distinct eddies of cat-green light ran from her eyes as she regarded me. It was clear that she felt more than she wished me to see, and I quitted the room to dress myself in obedience to her orders, with an uneasy apprehension that she had conceived a strong aversion to me.

I drove to Fulham with my young mistress's note, and returned the bearer of a box of lace, sent in reply by Lady Titler. It was

still the busy time of the afternoon when I arrived at Portland Place. I had lost no time in executing my commission, but the family were prepared for my reappearance; for, on entering the hall, I found all the servants assembled in it with eager and expectant faces.

“Oh, here she is!” they exclaimed, all in one breath, as I crossed the threshold; and before I could ask myself what the hubbub meant, a tall, burly man approached me and firmly grasped my wrist.

“What do you want?” I cried.

“Your name is Miriam Copley?”

“It is—yes. But what do you want?”

“I am a constable, and I arrest you on a charge of stealing your employer’s property.”

I was not allowed to reply; but hurried upstairs into Miss Geraldine’s private room, where I found that lady, her sister, her papa, and her mamma. On the principal table of the apartment was my writing-desk—the gift of

Caroline Ufford—which I had left securely locked in my own room. It had been (I was speedily informed) brought from its accustomed place to my mistress's boudoir, its lock had been forced, and its contents examined in the presence of the august party before which I stood, trembling with excitement and rage.

“How dare you break open my desk? I say how dare you? Who has done this?” I screamed, rushing forward to recover possession of my property.

“You had better be quiet,” observed the officer sententiously, pulling me backwards by the wrist. “Your tantrums can do no good. It's too plain a case for them. Half them gold pieces we found in the secret drawer are your young lady's. You know it. She marked 'em, and left 'em about on purpose to catch you. And now you are cotched you had better hold your tongue.”

There was a silence of a minute's duration, broken by Mrs. Plumetop whimpering, and by

Miss Plumetop gasping out, "How very terrible!" Then the Reverend Archer Plumetop hemmed, cleared his throat, and in an unctuous voice made the following speech:—

"Unfortunate, fascinating, and perverted girl, you are discovered! I took you into my family with strong feelings in your favour, but you have disappointed me, broken the eighth commandment, and falsified the character given you by my much-esteemed friend the Dowager Baroness of Ufford. Your crimes are enormous. But I will not harrow your feelings by further dilating on the atrocity of your conduct. You will proceed with me instantly to my friend, Mr. Serjeant Mogrum, who in his judicial capacity will, I doubt not, do me the favour of forthwith committing you for trial."

"On what charge, sir?" I asked.

"On a charge of stealing money, trinkets, and various articles of ornamental clothing from my daughter—Miss Geraldine Plumetop."

“We had better proceed to the magistrate instantly,” I responded sullenly. “Let us be off.”

Without delay I was led off by my captor, who still retained hold of my wrist, and was placed in a hack-carriage, and driven to the office of Mr. Serjeant Mogrum, a justice of the peace and personal friend of Mr. Plumetop's. The worthy magistrate had received an intimation that his services would be required; and in an excess of politeness he had remained half an hour later than usual at his office, so as to dispose of his friend's business. When I entered the magistrate's chamber, the only persons present, besides myself and the constable who had apprehended me, were the Justice himself, a clerk, and a couple of attendants. But in less than a minute the assembly was increased by the members of the Plumetop family. Geraldine was led in, supported by her papa and mamma. She was pale, and the expression of her eyes was

excited; but the firmness with which she drew her thin lips over her teeth convinced me that she would not falter in carrying out the abominable scheme she had commenced.

The necessary formalities were soon gone through. Geraldine gave her evidence clearly and concisely. She stated that she had for several weeks missed different articles of value from her toilet-table and writing-case, and specified a ring and a piece of lace which she had told me she had lost.—This ring and piece of lace had been found in one of my boxes.—Suspecting that she had been robbed, she left on her table marked money, which, in due course, had disappeared, and, in due course, had been found in my desk.—My desk was locked; there was no key in the house that could open it, and it was necessary to force the lock in order to effect a search of its contents.

Mr. Serjeant Mogrum took several pinches of snuff, and declared that I was the most

infamous creature he had met with in all his professional experience. Then the Serjeant looked at me—at first sternly—but afterwards in a more lenient manner; and finally he admitted that I did not look so bad as it appeared from the evidence before him I really was. He cautioned me not to say anything to criminate myself, and then asked me what I had to say why he should not commit me for trial.

In answer to this I told him I wished to say nothing at present.

So this preliminary business was speedily transacted. The clerk made out my committal; Mr. Serjeant Mogrum accepted an invitation to dine in Portland Place; the constable, gripping my wrist yet more firmly, led me off to prison; and in less than half an hour I was snugly lodged in a cell of a detention-house, there to await my trial.

The interval between my committal and trial was not a long one. Indeed at the time

of my incarceration the Central Criminal Court was sitting, and ere the expiration of another ten days I was placed in the dock in the presence of a venerable judge, an enlightened British jury, and a learned Bar, who did not think the better of me for not wishing to avail myself of the professional services of any of their members.

Short as the period was that I had to wait in prison previous to my trial, it was broken by visits from two representatives of the outer world—Miss Geraldine Plumetop and Mr. Aubrey. They came separately, but their visits were known to each other. Geraldine came first; she had obtained a magistrate's order to see me, and I was summoned from my own peculiar den to a cell where prisoners saw their friends, and was ushered into her presence by a turnkey, before I had learnt who it was that desired to see me.

The apartment in which we had our interview was a small one, with bare walls, and

furnished only with a table and two stools. A pad of paper, and an ink-stand and pens, were on the table, for the convenience of solicitors who might wish to make notes of what passed between themselves and the wretched clients, whose cases they entered into professionally in this and three other similar apartments with which the jail was provided. Into the centre of the door was let a small pane of thick glass, and on the outside stood a turn-key on guard, watching us, but unable to hear our words. Had I passed any concealed property, a coin, or a slip of paper, into my visitor's hand, had she given me a vial of poison, as a means of escaping the ignominy of a public conviction, or had I, giving way to the tiger's wrath that burnt within me, sprung upon her to rend her in pieces, the door would have flown open, and the athletic warder would have speedily restored order by the magic of a strong arm.

I had, therefore, a good reason for restrain-

ing my anger and assuming all possible composure, as I looked across the table at the pretty babe who had dealt my reputation a blow so terrible and so unexpected.

“Well,” said I, in a subdued tone, “are you satisfied?”

“Not yet, Miriam Copley; but I shall be,” she returned quickly.

“Why are you here?”

“Simply to amuse myself. I persuaded papa that I could not be happy unless he would let me come here to try to induce you to confess every particular of your abominable conduct, so that he might feel justified in recommending you to the judge’s mercy. But I have no wish that you should obtain mercy. We understand each other?”

“Quite.”

“You told me that Mr. Aubrey had never before insulted me by offering extreme attentions to you. You lied! I have watched you. My eyes were on you during at least

twenty interviews. When you slipped away to waylay him, I followed to act the spy on you. I took my measures accordingly. You have been outwitted,—and I shall be revenged.”

“I thank you for telling me this; but I knew it all before. Have you nothing new to communicate?”

“Your sentence will be a heavy one,” she proceeded, folding her hands and looking at me with an intensity of exultation that gave a singularly cruel expression to her childish face. “I have been speaking to papa’s solicitor, and he tells me you’ll be tried by Mr. Justice Wright, who is a very stern man. You’ll certainly be transported for seven years. Oh, I wish the law had not been altered! Why did they alter the law? I should so dearly like to get you a worse punishment!”

I shuddered at the vehemence of hate which she threw into her mild voice.

“Transportation,” she continued, “is very

different from what it was. It is a much more severe punishment than it was a few years since. You'll be starved with cold and hunger, you'll be worked like a slave, you'll be beaten, day after day, day after day, for seven long years."

"Good! But how about Mr. Aubrey? How will you be revenged on him?"

"I'll think about that by-and-bye, Miriam. It will be time enough to settle that when I'm his wife."

"Possibly I shall inform him of all that has transpired in this interview; and then it is not unlikely that he may not care to wed so gentle, tender-hearted a child as yourself."

"Pah!—he wont believe you. Tell him what you will. I'll send him to you. You shall see him to-morrow; and the worst you shall say of me will only appear to him as the base attempt of a madly jealous woman—a convicted *thief*—to sow discord between him and the girl he loves."

“ Loves !—Ha ! ha !—you flatter yourself !”

“ Do I, Miriam ? What ! doesn’t he love me ? Then, the more’s the pity, Miriam Copley, for I love him. Good-bye, Miriam Copley. I wish you pleasant thoughts. Good-bye.”

As she uttered this sudden farewell, she put the tips of her gloved fingers to her lips and kissed them. The turnkey outside, seeing her rise to depart, threw open the door, and she vanished from my sight.

The next day John Aubrey came to see me. Geraldine was as good as her word, and had sent him. Again I was summoned to the visitors’ room, but to be confronted, not with a girl,—but with a tall, powerful, and determined man.

“ Well, Stephen Watson, what has brought you here ?” I commenced the conversation by asking.

“ Geraldine told me she had been here in the hope of bringing you to a better frame of mind, and added that she thought you would

like to see me. Of course, I was compelled forthwith to visit you. So here I am. And honestly, Miriam Copley, I am sorry for you, and I would gladly do anything to serve you."

He spoke feelingly, but his earnestness of manner did not deceive me. I saw beneath the flash of his hypocritical eye satisfaction at my disaster; he feigned sympathy with my trouble, but I knew his commiserating tone was only a veil beneath which he hid his gladness at the prospect of having his path, for a long period, rid of a troublesome witness of his former career.

"Thank you. You can do nothing to serve me," I answered.

"Don't be so sure about that. I'll procure you the best legal advice that can be bought; and if you'll only tell me the whole truth, it's an odd thing if I can't devise some means of getting you off."

"The whole truth!—what do you mean?"

"In the first place, are you guilty? Never

mind about the silk things and the gloves. A stupid jury might be persuaded into believing they were given to you, and that the gift had been forgotten. The marked money is the difficulty to be got over. Did you steal that?"

"Yes, I did."

"You did?" he exclaimed with surprise.

"How else should it have got into my desk, where it was found? What startles you so?"

"Oh, I am not startled,—only I thought that possibly you had been somehow or other a victim of—"

He stopped short, and looked confused.

"You are afraid to go on," said I, "so I'll speak for you. A suspicion has crossed your mind that your pretty toy, Geraldine, has her own motives for wishing me ruined, and that she has had the courage to plot my destruction."

He hesitated, and then murmured, "What an extraordinary fancy! I never said so."

"Ah, but you *thought* so, Stephen Watson!"

Now be honest, man, and tell me truly—am I not right?”

“You’re a strange girl, Miriam. I’ll be frank with you. I had, somehow or other, suspected that the real state of the case was the exact reverse of appearances. From what I had seen of you, I did not think it was in you to pilfer pieces of riband, and stray guineas. And I was not so sure that Miss Geraldine would have been above the weakness of attributing such a frailty to you, if she had had a sufficient motive.”

I laughed cordially as I answered, “You’re a chivalric lover! On my word, I never expected to see a man show so much common sense in criticising his mistress’s character. But what motive could Geraldine have had for such an atrocious design?”

“You know as well as myself. You need not me to tell you, you dark-eyed goddess!”

As the fellow said this, I saw the lips of his hateful mouth, covered though they were with

hair, move with a gross animal expression, that caused me for a few short seconds to forget that he was of my own race, and to tremble as I should have done had some unclean beast, of another kind, stood gaping his jaws over me. But I could not then express the loathing I entertained for him. I smothered my rising resentment and disgust, and with a merry shake of my ringlets inquired,—

“ Well, John Aubrey, and if you had learnt that your suspicions were just; say frankly, would you still marry Geraldine? ”

“ Certainly. Why not? ’Tis not for any virtues I suppose her to possess, or lack, that I wish to marry her. My game is a different one. Surely, you don’t take me for a poet? ”

“ Then, listen to me. I speak the truth when I assure you that I never robbed Geraldine of anything. By some means or other, she introduced the money and missing articles into my cases, and so cleverly has she

carried out her damnable plot that there is no chance of escape for me. She for weeks together watched our meetings and intercourse, and this is her revenge. Only yesterday she was here, exulting over me and the success of her machinations."

"But, what will you do?"

"I must suffer as I best may. If I had time, I could collect the requisite proofs and expose your history to the girl's father, and in gratitude he would pay a certain amount of credit to my protestations of innocence, and would do his utmost to relieve me of the consequences of his daughter's conduct, that is to say,—his utmost, short of proclaiming her shame. But I have not this time. I must bear my fate. I have not a witness to call, nor a single piece of evidence to adduce in opposition to the charges. I might, it is true, tell my plain, unvarnished story; but who would believe it, unsupported by any testimony save that of my own lips? In the opinion of my

hearers I should only be adding to my crime of theft the greater crime of calumniating my young mistress, and slandering the man she loves."

"Can I, then, do nothing for you?" inquired my companion.

"Help me to my revenge."

"How?"

"Marry her."

"What else?"

"Nothing more; it will be quite enough for me, and her too," I answered bitterly.

"There are a hundred thousand reasons why I should obey you," he replied mockingly, in allusion to the amount of Geraldine's fortune.

A few more words passed between us, and he left me.

On the following Friday I was led into the dock.

I shall never forget the shame and the anguish of standing in that conspicuous and

ignominious position, with a dense mass of faces turned to me from the galleries that ran round the court,—from the pens appointed for the ordinary jurymen, from the velvet-cushioned seats set apart for the magistracy and other quality, from the cock-pit in which wigged barristers and attorneys were crammed together in orderly confusion. For a few seconds I stood abashed and drooping, and shrouded my eyes with my hands; but this craven humiliation soon gave way to a spirit of proud, reckless defiance, and, drawing myself up to the full height of my commanding form, I replied to the curious gaze of the spectators with a look of supreme scorn.

I felt as if I stood inches taller than ever I had been before; I had a sensation as if the muscles of my neck elongated themselves with a new power; I knew that my eyes flashed, and that there was a noble rage in my entire countenance. I had no intention of creating a favourable impression on the

beholders; but when I heard a buzz of approbation amongst the members of the bar below, and amongst the commonalty in the galleries above, I understood its meaning, and received it as my due.

The judge, a fine courtly old gentleman, raised his glasses to his eyes, and laid them down again on the cushion before him with an air of unmitigated astonishment at the aspect of the prisoner, and then looked round to that part of the select benches where the Rev. Archer Plumetop, supported by his solicitor and a couple of magistrates, sat a witness of the scene.

I pleaded "not guilty."

Although I had declined legal assistance in my defence, the prosecution was conducted by a phalanx of forensic power. In consideration of his eminent position in society, the Rev. Archer Plumetop had engaged the services of four counsel, one of whom was Mr. Boanerges Harker, Serjeant-at-law, M.P., &c., &c.

Mr. Serjeant Harker had had a chequered career. He had been successively a medical student, an actor, a dissenting minister, a keeper of an oyster-room, a lecturer in the provinces on political philosophy, a veterinary surgeon, and eventually an ornament of the English Bar. He had made himself useful to an attorney-general at a contested election, and the attorney-general had expressed his gratitude by paying his fees at the Temple, and giving him the run of his chambers. The vivacious and versatile Harker, without much difficulty, picked up enough knowledge of the law to astonish the profoundest jurists. His style of oratory was inimitable. No jury could hold their own against his seductive eloquence. He never insulted them by the ordinary unartistic flattery of telling them that jurymen of their particular county were superior in intelligence to jurymen of all other counties; neither did he bully them in the fashion of an eminent judge, yet living, who

when he was at the bar, told a Kentish jury that he doubted not they would find a verdict to the best of the abilities with which it had pleased God to bless them ; but he would smile upon them for a few seconds like a beneficent prince, and then, lowering his voice to a tone of confidential colloquy, would say :—

“Gentlemen of the Jury, you cannot disagree with me. I *defy* you to give a verdict against me. And why do I use such a bold word as *defy*? Is it because I think my humble powers of oratory can mislead your judgment, can unduly influence your powerful understandings? By no means ; but because, gentlemen of the jury, *we* are of the same rank of society ; and I feel assured that no one of *our* rank in society can regard this question in any other light than I do,” &c., &c. But Mr. Serjeant Harker had other valuable veins of humour besides blarney. He could convulse juries by subtle mimicry of the

witnesses he was cross-examining ; and on one occasion he utterly routed a venerable lady in the witness-box by asking her to state on her oath how many times a-week it was her erroneous impression that the kitchen-chimney was on fire. He could also, when there was need of such fireworks, be fervid, and consumed with a generous enthusiasm to protect suffering humanity from oppression and wrong. He was greatest when hurling his bitter sarcasms at a spoliator of virgin innocence, or when inveighing against the selfishness of the man who, forgetful of his children, would squander his substance in riotous living. No one hearing him on such occasions could without difficulty believe—what, nevertheless, was a fact—that he had been concerned as a principal in more than one disgraceful *esclandre*, and that his finances were in such a bankrupt condition that his clerk was his creditors' receiver.

Mr. Harker fully understood why he had

been summoned to conduct a paltry case in a mean criminal court, and he did duty accordingly. Instead of piling up evidence upon evidence, and testimony upon testimony, or rousing the feelings of the jury against me, he favoured the court with a nervous eulogium on the reputation his distinguished client, the Rev. Archer Plumetop, had earned for himself in the cause of humanity; he alluded to the Hospital for Decayed Applewomen and the Hospital for Veterans; and he enlarged on the prominent position held by the Rev. Archer Plumetop in the world of fashion. This done, with a few masterly strokes, he dashed off a telling picture of the domestic felicity which brooded over the hearth of the Rev. Archer Plumetop—his graceful wife and charming daughters, one of whom was on the point of forming an alliance with a gentleman, honourably known in the illustrious circles he had long adorned. Then I was brought before the court; and

the accomplished advocate danced round me, and performed so many rhetorical antics that, for the life of me, I thought I could not restrain myself from bursting into laughter. I was fair, but I was false; I had been trusted, and I had wronged the benefactress who had treated me as a familiar; I was the serpent of the fable; I was Delilah; in many respects I was the counterpart of Jezebel. It filled a philosophic observer with profound sadness to learn how the deadly poison of a vicious mind was often consigned to a casket of cunning workmanship and extreme loveliness.

Mr. Serjeant Harker was on the point of weeping over my degraded and pernicious nature; indeed, he had drawn his court-handkerchief half-way out of his pocket, to go through his most admired effects, when he remembered that at two o'clock he would, at Westminster, have to urge, with tears, on another jury the necessity of giving 1,000*l*.

damages to a costermonger, whose wife had deserted him in favour of "the infamous defendant." The learned Serjeant, therefore, seeing the necessity of getting the job done with all possible dispatch, repressed his rising emotions, and concluded his harangue.

The evidence against me was complete.

I cross-examined no witness. I did not put a single question to Geraldine, when, in a clear, though subdued, voice, she had uttered her ingenious perjuries. I remained silent, standing erect, with my right arm crossed over my breast, and with my left hanging by my side.

The judge, in a kind and reassuring voice, inquired what defence I could make in reply to the charge brought against me.

I took a step forward in the dock, and, moving my right hand slightly, as if to arrest the attention of a stranger with whom I wished to converse, I answered :—

"My Lord,—I see that you pity me, and,

believe me, I accept your compassion with gratitude. Your commiseration will be yet greater when I assure you solemnly, as I did at the outset of these proceedings, that I am innocent of the thefts with which I am accused, but that I have no evidence with which to rebut the testimony against me, and no arguments which can clear me of the ignominy that has fallen upon me.

“ Though the court listened patiently to the disinterested praise showered on my persecutors by their counsel, I have no right to think that I should be permitted to make a counter-statement on points not immediately connected with my painful situation. Nor do I wish to cast ridicule on a family in which I have experienced much kindness. In justice to myself, I will only repeat that I am innocent. I will not labour to show you that Miss Geraldine has reason to harbour against me sentiments of the bitterest animosity ; nor will I do more than merely suggest that it is

owing to her wicked machinations I appear here before you—dishonoured for life. I have ample reasons for not advancing statements which, though they might not demonstrate me to be guiltless, would, at least, damage the character of my adversary.

“My lord, I thank you sincerely for your attention and considerate demeanour. For the present, I have only to endure a brief continuation of this public disgrace, till the gentlemen of the jury shall have pronounced me guilty, and you shall have ordered me to expiate, in suffering and captivity, the sin of being unfortunate.”

There was loud applause when I bowed to the judge, and ceased speaking; but this demonstration was immediately checked by the servants of the court. Mr. Serjeant Harker's practised eloquence had elicited no such acclamations. For a few seconds I enjoyed an intoxicating gush of triumph at this novel victory.

Concisely, and with strict impartiality, the judge summed up the evidence, and told the jury, in a voice of no ordinary emotion, that they had no course open to them but to return a verdict of "guilty." The stolen property had been found in my boxes, under my lock and key; and there was no reason for suspecting for one instant that any other evil-disposed person, with a view to damaging the reputation of the prisoner, had put the articles where they were discovered. His lordship was sorry that the prisoner had not pleaded "guilty;" and yet more sorry that she had added to her original crime the shame of uttering malicious and, it was his duty to say, groundless statements with regard to a young lady who had given her evidence in the trial with great propriety.

His Lordship concluded his oration with a bow to the jury; and the intelligent members of that conscientious body, having knocked their heads together, like a parcel of stupid

sheep, and interchanged whisperings for the space of several seconds, caused their foreman, who, of course, had an impediment in his speech, to say that they had found a unanimous verdict of "Guilty!"

After a few hasty expressions of sorrow at my position, and a brief expression of hope that I should in after-life redeem my lost character, and become a valuable member of society, the kind old judge, in consideration of a recommendation to mercy, and in a firm confidence that I should amend my ways, sentenced me to one year's imprisonment.

The leniency of the sentence evidently astonished the audience. There was a cheer of congratulation for me from the galleries, and a hum of surprise amongst the barristers, some of whom smiled their amusement at what had transpired. Mr. Serjeant Harker exchanged a few rapid sentences with an attorney, and then remarked that *he* had not recommended the prisoner to mercy, nor had the jury.

“But her beauty has, brother Harker,” responded the old judge, smiling; “her beauty is a recommendation to mercy. To send such a woman as that abroad would make transportation attractive.”

There was a noise of laughter, and cheers, and cries of “order, order,” “Silence in the court—silence!” Mr. Serjeant Harker bowed to his clients, and hurried off to plead in behalf of the injured husband at Westminster, stopping on the way, however, at “The Rainbow,” in Fleet Street, for a pot of London stout, whereby to muddle his intelligence down to the standard of a British jury;* and I—was led away to endure my term of punishment.

* The above well-known joke has been told of various legal celebrities of the present century, but it is a pleasantry of considerable antiquity. Sir John Millicent, of Cambridge-shire (who was knighted at Royston, Jan. 20, 1606-7; and is mentioned in “Weldon’s Court of James I.”), on “being ask’t how he did conforme himselfe to the grave justices his brothers, when they met, ‘Why, in faithe,’ sayes he, ‘I have no way but to drinke myself downe to the capacitie of the Bench.’”—*Vide* “Anecdotes and Traditions,” edited by Mr. Thoms, F.S.A. Pub. Cam. Soc.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW PROJECT.

I WILL not torture my readers with a detail of what I underwent in prison. My pages already contain too many painful scenes. It is enough to say I experienced all the merciful provisions of the law (an attack of jail-fever being, of course, included amongst them), and that I quitted the scene of my punishment with a mind embittered, rather than grateful, to society for its chastisement.

I was of a crooked and perverse nature, and I extracted from the corrective discipline I was subjected to pernicious poison instead of purifying medicine.

I resume my story when I had been already three months liberated from prison. I was then about one-and-twenty years of age, and, though worn with hardship, and stripped of a large portion of my glossy locks and former bloom by fever, I was entering on a period when my personal charms would, in the ordinary course of nature, reach their perfection.

On recovering my freedom I tried various ways of earning an honest livelihood, and failed. I sought domestic service, but I could not find a family to receive me without a character, or (yet worse) with the confession on my lips that I had just emerged from a House of Correction. The same objections prevented the best milliners from employing me, but I obtained work from the slopsellers. The pay-

ment, however, for this humblest kind of needlework was so small that I could not support myself by it. Experienced hands could make a trifle more; but ten hours' incessant toil, with aching eyes, aching neck, and aching fingers, only procured me a penny, and from the weekly sixpence thus earned a penny had to be paid to the work-room fund, for thread and needles. Whenever I offered myself as a candidate for a place in a respectable vocation, I found that my beauty, moiled and faded as it was by recent suffering, was an obstacle to me; it caused me to be an object of suspicion; the fact that the stamp of native superiority had been set on my wan face was more than once a sufficient reason for my being sneered at "as none too good."

Since my beauty shut me off from one kind of crust, I determined that it should get me another. I knocked at the door of one of the minor theatres—a wretched house in Shore-

ditch—(I knew it was no use my thinking of getting admission into one of a higher grade), and I offered my services to the manager. He asked me what I could do. I told him nothing on the spur of the moment, but, with study and time, enough to make the fortune of his theatre. I recited him half-a-dozen of the best-known speeches made by Shakspeare's heroines; and, though I was nearly fainting with hunger, from having fasted for two days, I sang him two of the quaint Scotch ballads which Caroline Ufford had taught me. Were not these accomplishments worth money? And, in addition, would not my appearance, in proper costumes, be an acquisition to the staff of the theatre? The old manager (a small man, shrewd, but tender-hearted) eyed me with considerable surprise, and something of approval, but he assured me that he was not in a position to profit by my offer. He already had too many ladies in his *corps*, and—and—. My countenance doubtless told the

kindly man how keenly I felt his rejection, for he faltered with a manifest desire to soften the pain of the refusal. And I, at this unexpected expression of sympathy, was overcome by my feelings, and, sinking down on a vacant chair, fairly sobbed out my mortification.

“Nay—nay—poor young lady!” protested the manager. “Don’t cry in that way. I see you are quite a superior person; and he must be a rare villain who has brought you to this state. But you’ve been ill—’tis clear you have, by the thinness of your cheeks, and the scantiness of your hair. And just now you’ve not bodily strength enough for an actress, nor—nor—don’t be offended—nor bloom enough, nor flesh enough. No amount of paint and padding would make up the deficiency. Besides, one night’s work in your present condition would kill you. But if you come again in a few months’ time, in better health—and—so on, why, I’ll then try and do something for you. At present, however, I must say ‘no.’

Only, my dear lady, take this ; it may help you for a few days. It isn't much ; only then you must remember my gallery is only a penny, my pit threepence, and my boxes sixpence."

Considering the small prices of the manager's theatre, I deemed his donation a liberal one. It was a five shilling-piece ; and, as soon as he had forced it into my hand, he hurried away to avoid my thanks. God bless that true gentleman's memory ! He is dead now ; but for several years, ere his death, he was amongst my most cherished friends, and I raised him to be manager of the first theatre in London.

I saw the justice of the manager's sentence, as well as the goodness of his heart. It was clear that I was so out of condition that my personal charms, though sufficient to bar me from many employments, were not able to help me to others. My beauty was not marketable, nor would it be so till several months of

good living and rest had plumped out and tinted my cheeks, restored elasticity to my step and strength to my limbs, filled out my figure, and renewed the lustre and luxuriance of my locks. In my present dilapidated state the stage would not have me for the humblest item of a pageant, artists would not hire me for a model, proprietors of supper-rooms would not waste spangled gauze upon me.

I resolved that if I could live on, and recover my good looks, I would go upon the stage. So much encouragement, at least, the manager's words had given me.

But how to live in the meantime? How to live, so that health and comeliness might return to me?

A ghastly dread came over me that I had sunk too low down the steep bank whose base is concealed in the black pool of destruction ever to recover myself. Every instant seemed bringing me nearer the point when I should drop, with a stifled cry, down the slime into

the hateful mire. It was no use clutching at straws and dank herbage; they could not support me. Oh! proud ladies and gentlemen, who, glancing at your fair hands and lithe forms and cherished graces, talk complacently of the physical expressions of ancient lineage and spotless *noblesse*, repeat and ponder well the words—sickness, hunger, starvation,—not sickness as you know it in your warm rooms, but sickness without a nurse in the wet streets; not hunger, as you know it, a piquant novelty after a longer ride than usual, but hunger, lasting for weeks and weeks, and broken only by scant rations of impure food, barely enough to keep the meagre blood up to the lowest standard requisite for life; not starvation as you know it, when the tingling frost sends you from the terrace to the library fire, but cold, such as I have known it, a monster, crunching the marrow of human bones, because no one fills its greedy maw with a bag of cinders or a bunch

of firewood. I say, think of these stern powers, and where your petted comeliness, in which you pride yourself so much, would have been, if your youth had been sacrificed to them,—if the necks of your sires had been held in their insatiate gripe! This I know, and say for your souls' benefit;—I, Miriam Copley, who have outshone the brightest and loveliest of your daughters, had reason, at one wretched period of my existence, to assure myself,—“ Even as a flower's richest colour is produced from the unsightly earth, so mortal beauty is made of the base substance to which eventually it returns; and, unless I can procure a necessary supply of nourishment and heat, deep inerasable lines will fix themselves in my wan cheeks, my lips will for ever lose their form, my eyes their lustre, and the beauty which Nature prided herself in producing, will be dissipated beyond the power of nature to re-create it.”

But (whether I should be grateful to God

for it or not, I am unable to decide) the worst of my fears was not realized.

For eight days I supported existence upon the five shillings given me by the charitable manager. On the ninth day I fasted, roaming the intricate streets of London, in whose hurrying crowds I met with none to befriend me, and knew of none to whose benevolence I could apply. The tenth I spent in the like way ; it was a bright, crisp Sunday, close upon Christmastide, and I was out upon the pavements, in the frosty air, from early morning till night. I heard the bells chime from hundreds of churches, inviting pious people to enter and praise God for "all the blessings of this life." I wandered on till those pious people, hurrying home from their devotions to hot luncheons, or midday dinners, and such other "blessings of this life," thrust me from the kerb-stone into the gutter. No one threw me a penny ; no one said, "God help you !" Even young girls turned their

eyes from me. I would have begged aloud for a meal ; but I dared not, for some of the passers-by muttered audibly that “it was a shame the streets should be infested by mendicants, bent on deceiving benevolent ladies,” (God save the mark !—where were the benevolent ladies ?) and, ignorant of what hard laws there might be against starving wretches, I slunk away, fearing that I should again be consigned to prison barbarities.

As the afternoon wore on, my agony of hunger made me debate if I could get a meal by disposing of any of the remains of my tattered raiment. I had scarce enough clothing on me for the purposes of decency, not a tenth of what would have been barely enough to protect me from the inclemency of the weather ; but, to save myself from the last consequences of inanition, I would have pawned my old dress and worn shoes for sixpence. It was not till I had determined on doing so that I remembered it was Sunday,

and that no pawning shops were open. So I staggered on and on, waiting till I should sink down utterly exhausted. It is magnanimous in me to offer any excuse for the inhumanity of the crowds that flowed past me, bent on the sacred enjoyments or festive gatherings of the Sabbath; but I doubt not, many who saw me thought that I reeled from one side of the pavement to the other under the influence of strong drink.

I remember standing in a narrow street of Mayfair, looking up at Stetchworth House; and as I reflected what a ghastly, cadaverous outcast I was, I called to mind how Mrs. Gelatine had told me the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth was a munificent patron to beautiful girls. Under a strange fascination that allured me to the spot which most people, under my miserable circumstances, would have shunned, I roamed round the mansion of the Rev. Archer Plumetop in Portland Place, looking up at the windows of my old apartment. A carriage drew

up opposite the door ; its panels were blazing with one of Long-acre's tawdry lies, it was drawn by two superb chestnut horses, and a coachman and footman in blue and silver livery completed the splendour of the equipage. In a few seconds the house door opened, and Geraldine (now Mrs. Aubrey, of Berkeley Street, and Alton Park, Surrey,) descended the white stone steps and tripped up into the carriage. Her husband followed her, and took his seat by her side. His beard and moustache had grown so much that scarce a trace was visible of Stephen Watson's large mouth and cruel lips. If he could only have grown his eyebrows over his sinister, secretive eyes, he might have passed even before my critical observation as an honest gentleman.

The lacquey banged the door to, and ere he had sprung to the footboard the carriage was driven sharp round a corner where I stood, shivering against the lamp-post. Mr. Aubrey did not see me ; but Geraldine's eyes (she was

sitting on the side of the carriage nearest to me, and was looking out of the window) met mine, and instantly recognised me. I saw a smile of triumph light up her waxen face, and I saw her raise her little doll's hands and clap them together—to insult and mock me. The carriage was but an instant in turning the corner; but an instant was long enough for all this to take place, and to be seen.

“Then you're back at last, are you?” I exclaimed to myself, shaking my feeble arm angrily at the receding carriage. “Then, Mistress Stephen Watson, you have at length returned from the Continent, where you and your husband (Satan knows on what business) have been for the weary weeks since I was let out of jail. It shall not be many days ere you hear what you'll love me for telling you. You shall live in craven dread of me—dread of my proclaiming to the world your husband's history and your shame. And this very night he shall give me money.”

I hastened on after the carriage with new

vigour suddenly imparted to me, and the intention of proceeding forthwith to Berkeley Street, to demand assistance from Mr. Aubrey ere he should have alighted ten minutes from his carriage. I made no doubt that he and Geraldine were on their way home; but in a few seconds the equipage, turning to the right, and thundering off at a rapid pace for a directly opposite quarter of the West-end, showed me that expectation was to be disappointed. Clearly it would be useless my going at once to the residence of the young married couple. Very likely they were driving out to make a long list of calls, and would not return till a late dinner; it was more than possible that they were off to dine and pass the night with friends in some suburb. No; I would do my best to wait out one more cold night, and in the morning I would present myself before Rawleigh Ufford's valet.

I turned away—once more in the direction of May-fair. Somehow the excitement of the

last few minutes had dissipated a large part of my physical suffering and discomfort. My brain was clearer, and my heart beat steadier. Violent emotion had been to me as good as meat and wine. Yes, I could hold out for another night—till the middle of another day ; and probably I should soon find some weak-minded mortal to give me a supper. In a few more hours, gentlemen would be winding their way homewards from their tavern and club dinners ; and it was just possible that some one of them, disarmed of reason and manly dignity by generous potations, would perpetrate the drunken frolic of—feeding the hungry. Hope revived within me. I strolled once more round Stetchworth House. It grew dark, and I saw lamp after lamp lit up in the murky streets. I waited at the doors of rich men in magnificent squares, and saw carriages drive up in succession with guests invited to “snug little dinners—nobody but ourselves—Sunday, you know.”

Hour succeeded hour ; but no one gave me a dinner. It was Sunday, and there were not so many tipsy gentlemen about as on ordinary nights. Not a Scotchman was to be found anywhere.

The clock of St. Martin's Church in Trafalgar Square had struck nine !

I toiled up St. Martin's Lane, and turned into Long Acre. I continued my weary route up Long Acre into Great Queen Street, and so into Lincoln's Inn Fields, under the dark corner of the ugly mansion where the famous Duke of Newcastle, more than a century since, made the English name ridiculous.

There was a crowd at the Turnstile corner of the Fields, listening to a street-preacher, who, elevated upon a stool, and with the light of a gas-lamp falling full upon his face, called aloud on sinners to repent, and on suffering believers in Christ's religion to wait patiently yet awhile, for the hour of their triumph was at hand.

I drew nigh, and listened.

“The fellow is a dog of some culture : he is evidently a scholar and a gentleman by education, and he knows what he is after,” observed an affected and ridiculously arrogant, but still pleasant, voice in the crowd behind me. The speaker was a gentleman, evidently of a critical turn of mind.

“Yaas,” slowly responded the companion to whom the unknown speaker had addressed himself, “it’s such fellows who do all the mischief, and put a thousand pestilent notions into the minds of the common people. Gad ! I should like to see such scoundrels hung, ay, or burnt, and their miserable dupes whipt at a cart’s tail for blocking up the public ways, and leaving their parish churches empty. And, let me tell you, when England was a country worth living in, such discipline was maintained !”

“Perhaps you are right ; but I was pointing to what after all is an interesting feature

of these *popular* movements, as they are called. They never prosper till one of our class leads the way. Wesley was a gentleman; Edward Irving has good blood in his veins; and then, look at Rowland Hill!"

"Traitors!"

"I can't say who that man may be, but he never acquired his learning and eloquence on a cobbler's bench."

"I can tell you who he is. I know him. He has parts, but he is a scoundrel. Come, don't let's stop longer here; it's cold."

The two gentlemen drew their cloaks closer round them, and moved away.

I stayed on with the ragged, poverty-stricken congregation. The preacher had a thin, sharp, pale face; there was in his grey eye a wandering expression which did not accord with the earnestness of his words; but he was tall, and of a manly presence; and as he stood erect and uncovered, with the cold wind waving his flaxen hair, and with the rays

of the powerful gas-lamp streaming upon his head, and giving one Rembrandt dash of light to a scene which elsewhere was all gloom and obscurity, his aspect well befitted an expounder of divine truths.

His auditors, at least three hundred in number, were evidently well-pleased with him. They herded together in a close, compact body, and, though there was a continual succession of loiterers who stayed to hear a few words, and then passed on with a sneer or a laugh, the permanent assembly increased every minute. There are two sorts of sacred oratory popular with the poor: the one belonging to a section of the Calvinistic school, and delighting in appalling descriptions of the terrors of the popular theology—the worm that never dies, the eternity of punishment, and the impossibility of any, save a predestinated few, avoiding it; the other, a more pleasant one,—the burden of whose utterances is Hope.

The preacher's style was of the latter sort. He spoke to his hearers of the incessant misery of their lives—their natural cravings unsupplied, their bodily ailments uncured, their sordid homes, and social degradation. His glowing sentences gave them a more vivid sense of the cruelty of their lot than even long experience had imparted to them; he knew every particular of the wretchedness and oppression they groaned under, not only better than they could tell him, but far—far better than *he* could tell them. His voice softened down from its deep-rolling thunder to silver tones of commiseration. Then, for several seconds, his emotions altogether robbed him of utterance, as he regarded the abject condition of his fellow-men. Would to God it were otherwise! Would to God he could alter it!—that he could take on his own shoulders all the burden of their woes! But he could not. He was only a weak man, a poor one, a fellow-sufferer with them.

If he had worldly riches, Heaven could testify how gladly he would shower creature comforts upon them. He could only hope that his words might be blessed to them; that they would be enabled to bear them away in their memories, and make practical use of them in their daily lives, deriving from the course he should urge them to pursue the same consolation and spiritual benefit that he had obtained from it. If that hope—that prayer—should be realized, they would understand what our Saviour meant when He said that “man should not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding out of the mouth of God.” Then he entered upon a consideration of the *brevity* of the life of any one individual, and what an insignificant portion of an everlasting existence was the short space of time that mortals spent upon the face of the earth. He implored them to ponder this well; for the proper appreciation of it would not only assist them to regard

their manifold sorrows as matters of comparatively trivial importance, but also save them from attributing undue weight to, and consequently from envying, the blessings of the wealthy. Life was so transitory, that to any one keenly expectant of the eternal joys of heaven it was a matter of small moment, whether it was passed amidst the luxuries of a palace, or the privations of condemned and sordid penury. That night—that very night—any one of them might perish, and then, when all the trouble of this fretful term of experience had ceased, what would be the significance, what the consequence, of the bodily pain, the mental anguish, the neglect and the contumely, they had smarted under during their sojourn here?

Nothing; unless it should appear—and it was more than probable that it would so appear—that the very disadvantages they had laboured under in this life had been the protection of their souls' eternal welfare. For, as worldly

prosperity was of so pernicious an influence, that it had been declared by One who could not err in judgment, or take from, or add anything to, the truth, that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven; so, on the other hand, the afflictions of this sad existence—the oppression of the spoiler, the evil wrought by the malignant tongue, the scorn of the proud, and all the elements of misery that were so mysteriously thrown around us—often drove into the kingdom of heaven those who, without the sting of such goads and scourges, would in indolence have slumbered by the way, or with perverse wickedness would, in spite of warning, have taken the downward road which leads to destruction. Oh, instead of repining that they were hemmed in by circumstances which compelled them, if they would have the black gloom of their wretchedness illumined by one ray of hope, to think as

little as possible of this world, and as much as possible of the one to come, let them thank the wise Providence which mercifully seemed bent on preserving them from the confusion of the fool who said unto his soul, "Eat, drink, and be merry!"

The man's sermon must have lasted an hour and a-half. In a fashionable chapel half an hour is as long as a well-trained preacher dares to tax the patience and polite devotion of his congregation, and, even so, he is a favoured man if there are not more nodding heads than awakened consciences, and more irritated tempers than renewed hearts, amongst his auditors. But of all the crowd that had listened to this fervid evangelist, there was not one who did not feel a lively interest and delight in every sentence that was uttered. Toil-worn women, with forms distorted by labour, and pallid countenances, of strange unsightliness; shivering girls, with cotton kerchiefs over their thin shoulders; squalid operatives, unable to

find work, and offensive to "Society" because they were bold enough to proclaim it hard that honest men should unwillingly be held by idleness and starvation; such, in all the various stages of age and deformity, composed the majority of the assembly. But as they listened, a change, fitfully visible as the flaming gas-jet flickered with the wind, came over their wan and furrowed faces. One could read therein an assurance that the burning language of the speaker had raised them, for the time, out of the degrading, exasperating, and brutifying consciousness of their hard experiences; had elevated them above the corrupt atmosphere they ordinarily breathed (a moral atmosphere in which a deep embittered sense of insult, mad longings for vengeance, and suicidal rage, had overpowered every healthier element)—had lifted them into a purer air, and given them a foretaste of those joys which from my inmost heart I supplicate the Almighty to bestow on all men—even my

most cruel enemies. It was almost to be believed that, could that state of spiritual exaltation have been sustained for a longer period, that field of upturned faces would have exchanged their grime, and sores, and battered features for lasting beauty.

But the service ceased; and with a murmur of gratitude the throng dispersed. Immediately the preacher had descended from the stool, which a devout keeper of a neighbouring coffee-stall had lent him, he hastened across the square and into an obscure passage which leads through those intricate purlieus which lie between Lincoln's Inn Fields and the Strand. He walked fast, but I kept close upon him, and as he was darting into a slimy alley, scarce wide enough for two people to pass in it without brushing each other's garments, I glided up to him, and laid my hand upon him.

"Don't stop me,—you are mistaken, my poor woman," he said quickly.

“For mercy’s sake, in the name of that heaven of which you have been preaching, help me! I shall die of hunger this night.”

“Then you are nearer heaven than I am.”

“Or nearer—”

I paused.

He was silent for a minute, during which he held one of my wrists in his right hand, and felt my pulse.

“You are indeed exhausted. Your pulse bears witness to the truth of your story. After all, the heart is not so deceitful as the tongue. Come with me. I will take you home with me, and give you some supper.”

“I will follow you, sir, if it is not far,” I answered faintly, for a giddiness now came over me, and I had good reason to doubt if I could walk the required distance.

“’Tis not two hundred yards; but you can hardly manage that. Here, lean well on me. That’s it. If you like, I’ll carry you in my

arms, or on my shoulders. A better man than I am did that good service to a poor woman some hundred years since, in a street hard by this court."

As he spoke, we entered a clean and airy yard, and in another minute we stood in the largest court of New Inn.

With all speed my companion led me up three flights of a steep staircase of massive oak, and, having introduced me into a room lighted by a blazing fire, laid me down gently on a couch. Without a word he lighted a lamp, giving me by that means a better view of a large, ill-furnished apartment, in which a painter's easel, scores of unframed pictures, piles of newspapers, books lying helter-skelter on the floor, broken shelves, and packets of manuscript combined to create a confusion such as I had never witnessed before in any room. While I was surveying all these objects with curiosity, and a wonder as to what would turn up next, my entertainer

took a brandy-bottle from a cupboard, and, with the aid of the water that was bubbling in a large kettle upon the fire, he soon compounded for me a glass of inspiriting beverage.

“There,” said he, “sip that—don’t take it in draughts, for I don’t want it to make you tipsy. Sip it with a tea-spoon, and in a minute I’ll give you a cold meat sandwich.”

Good as his word, the hospitable man brought me a large sandwich ere the minute had elapsed, and as he placed it before me he continued his directions in an authoritative but kindly style, “There, eat that slowly with your brandy-and-water; and by the time you have devoured it, you’ll be ready for a mutton-chop, which I’ll proceed to grill for you, *secundum artem*. I shall throw a suspicion of Cayenne over it, for you require every kind of stimulant. No. Hold your tongue. No talking at present. We’ll enter on conversation after you have finished your supper.”

I need not say this arrangement was pleasing to me. Deliberately I consumed first my sandwich, and then my hot mutton-chop. It was such a long time since I had had so luxurious a meal, that I seemed to be making a perfectly Epicurean banquet. New vigour and life were infused into me ; and as I lay on the sofa, munching the concluding morsels of the feast, I was surprised at finding myself in a state of high good humour with the turn events had taken.

And now, thought I, to make this kind gentleman start !

But the wind was completely taken out of my sails by his suddenly turning round upon me, and saying with a hearty intonation, "Now, then, how do you feel after your repast ? Answer me that—Miriam Copley !"

"Very much better—and I sincerely thank you for it, Mr. Millicent," I stammered.

"Oh, you know me, then ?" he answered coolly.

“I knew you when my eyes first fell upon you—at the commencement of your sermon.”

“Ah, then you heard my discourse? Did you like it? Did it astonish you to see me in such a position?”

“It did; but I think the better of you for it.”

“Then you thought badly of me before?”

“No, Mr. Millicent,—only the little I had known of you did not induce me to think that you would care enough about the poor to give them so much good advice.”

“Then profit by the lesson you have received; and, for the future, think more charitably of your neighbours. But never mind my sermon, or your want of charity just now. Tell me something about yourself. How long have you been out of prison?”

“What! you know that?” I exclaimed. “And does, then, everyone know it? Was it not enough for me to undergo all the pain and self-contempt I passed through in prison, but,

in addition, must I have to bear as long as I live the ignominy of being pointed at—as a liberated convict?”

“No—no—my poor girl! Your case is not as bad as that. I saw your trial, and witnessed all your demeanour in court. It is no surprising thing, therefore, that I am acquainted with your calamity. Now tell me all about it—the truth, and the whole truth. If you want me to assist you, you must be candid with me.”

There was a kindness in his manner which invited confidence. I felt that I had judged him hastily and with undue severity, in forming a low estimate of him, when literally I had only seen him thrice before, in the whole course of my life. And now, as I looked at him, I imagined that I discovered in him many signs of a good and generous nature. His face, in the firelight, softened with much tenderness, and, as he drew a chair to the sofa on which I lay, and seated himself by my side, he took my hand in his,—as if to assure

me I might rely on him for protection and counsel.

Thus invited, I told him without prevarication, or reticence, or exaggeration, the story of my life since that memorable day of the duel. It must have taken me nearly an hour to do this, but at the time I was not distressed by the exertion of speaking so long; for the humour of utterance and communicativeness came upon me, and I had an attentive auditor. Without moving, or interjecting one single word of interruption, Charles Millicent sat a listener to my narrative, evincing his strong interest in my words by the fixedness with which he gazed at me, and the unbroken silence which he maintained.

“Yours is an astounding tale!” he said deliberately, when I had made an end of speaking, “and I believe every word of it.”

“Of course you do,” I answered sharply.

“No ‘of course’ in the matter. I can

assure you that I don't think you'd find another man in all London so credulous."

"Indeed!"

"Ay! and I," he added with a laugh, "should not believe you, if I was nothing but the psalm-singing ranter you took me for just now."

"What then?" I asked sadly, out of the genuine pain I felt at his words, "were you not in earnest? but only laughing at those poor wretches? I cannot credit it."

"Well, well, don't be alarmed. I have not pleaded guilty to that charge yet. God knows, I have no right to play with them and their miseries for my own amusement, as I might with a boxful of puppets, unless being more really wretched than any of them constitute a right. Nay, nay, I am not so bad as that comes to yet."

"Then, what are you?"

He smiled, and gave a short scoffing laugh, as if he were on the point of thrusting aside

my question with a flippant retort ; but better thoughts and more solemn feelings checked him, and he answered,—

“ You have spoken so freely to me that you doubtless feel you have a right to a confession from me. And I cannot deny you are right. What am I ? Why, neither man nor woman ; but a man cursed with woman’s weakness, and a woman endowed with masculine vices. I have not one healthy pleasure in life ; not even one reputable amusement. I haven’t a friend who wouldn’t shoot me to-morrow for a thousand pounds, or who would not cut me, if by doing so he could put himself one peg higher on the social ladder. All my heart and energies have for fifteen years been turned to rising in life, to ‘ making my game ’ by my wits, and I am further from my ambition now than I was at the outset. I am a miserable, disappointed, broken-down hack ; with foiled ambition seated in the place from which hope has long been driven. Instead of

being a prominent man, influencing the thought of his generation, the friend of the rich and powerful, I grind away in this cursed garret all my brains, and health, and worse self—just as, years ago, I ground away my better self—for a bare existence, and the insolent pity of all the fools who are passing me by in the race of life. A good man wouldn't care for this. I know it. But I am not a good man; I'm a bad one. My pleasures are all the coarsest ones of dissipation; my only periods of enjoyment are found in the drunken taverns of the Haymarket; and, even in them, when I'm in the humour to be merry, the consciousness of my degradation puts more aching sorrow in my heart than the wine does droll conceits in my brain. No honest man wishes me well; and 'tis years since a really good woman put her hand in mine without feeling uneasy till she withdrew it. This was not the case always. Like all other poor devils, I did *not mean* it at the

beginning; but, Heaven help me, I can mean nothing else better now! Well! you can now guess what kind of feelings induced me (as I chanced, while wandering about the streets trying to bite down my bitter thoughts, to come across a parcel of poor rangers) to mount the stool a purblind stammerer had vacated, and to tell the poor things how I thought they could best soften the harshness of their evil fortunes! Why, girl, on this very day, some ten years since, my mother died, heart-broken, ay, as God will one day judge me for it!—heart-broken by my crimes. Do you suppose, on such an anniversary, a man's brain can think of heaven and hell, and not turn like the core of a whirlpool?"

He commenced this singular confession with slow utterances, made in a subdued tone of voice, that indicated an unwillingness to avow the secrets of his grief; but as he proceeded, his words came quicker, and his accents rose to a pitch that almost bor-

dered on violence. His countenance, too, became illumined with an intensity of emotion, and his restless, eager eyes flashed in a manner that terrified me to witness. I remembered afterwards that at that particular time the conviction crossed me, that he was of a temperament something more than merely morbidly excitable; in short, that there lurked in his mental constitution the seeds of insanity; but this vivid impression, without being erased in any way, was for a period superseded by other thoughts of more immediate and engrossing interest, and I wasted no anxiety upon it, till events—years afterwards—made every memory of that interview important to me.

In a few seconds his excitement subsided, or, I ought rather to say, found a different form of expression. He took a firmer hold of my hand, and, raising it to his lips, kissed it repeatedly, and when in this way he had displayed a yearning for human sympathy with

his sorrow, he covered his face with his hands, and sobbed with a childish impotence of grief, that alarmed me even more than his louder demonstrations of mental disturbance.

When he grew calmer—and it was not long ere he did so—he moved away from me, and, seating himself on a stool near the fire, remained silent for several minutes, alternately watching me and the blazing coal.

“I ought to be going, Mr. Millicent,” I said, rising from the sofa, and finding myself much weaker than my exhilarated spirits had flattered me I was; “I am much better—thanks to your kindness.”

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Anywhere—to look for a bed.”

“And haven’t you a lair of any sort to creep into, that you must go and look for one?”

“Not one of any kind.”

“Poor girl! then you can’t do better than keep here.”

“I shall disturb you.”

“That will repay me for my hospitality. Your presence, and the necessity of looking to your comfort will change the current of my thoughts, and save me from the sin of suicide.

“I thank you. Yes—I should like to remain here—yes, I must remain here—for I am too weak to stand.”

“Poor Miriam! Poor girl!—there, there, don’t be hysterical!—be a good, brave girl for a few minutes longer, and then you’ll be in bed. You want rest, you want kindness. God pardon those who have wronged you! There—there!—cry like that—not fitfully, but long and tenderly, as if this was a natural place for you to sink down in.”

As he spoke, he arranged the sofa-cushions comfortably beneath my head, he pulled the old easel round between me and the fire, and constructed a screen for my throbbing eyes, he smoothed the hair of my head tenderly with his hands; once—but only once—he stooped down and kissed me on the forehead;

and then he went into an adjoining room, and for some minutes busied himself with making alterations in it for my reception.

When he reappeared, I was again mistress of my feelings, and was able to give a satisfactory answer to his inquiry if I felt strong enough to step into the next apartment and prepare for sleep.

“Bravely spoken!” he responded to my assurance that I could without assistance find my way to the bed he put at my service; “bravely spoken! You’ll be a good patient. There—God bless you, and a good night’s rest to you! If you like, you can bar the door on the inside. And if you should wake in the night and want anyone near you, rap at the wainscot over your head—or call out loud. I shall be sure to hear you, for I shall pass the night on the sofa.”

END OF VOL. II.

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Miriam Copley /



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